

# COMRADES THREE



WILLIAM R. A. WILSON

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## **COMRADES THREE**







“ François had escaped ! ”

[Page 116.]



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# COMRADES THREE

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*By*

WILLIAM R. A. WILSON

AUTHOR OF "A ROSE OF NORMANDY,"  
"A KNOT OF BLUE," ETC.



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TO  
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# COMRADES THREE

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## CHAPTER I

IN WHICH A SHIP ARRIVES AND TWO VOYAGERS  
RECEIVE A STRANGE WELCOME

“A FINE morning, my lads, after so much storm and fog! Do you not rejoice with me that this tedious journey is almost over?”

The stanch ship *L'Ardente* had battled hard for her royal master, Louis XIV, in her long and arduous voyage from the busy harbor of La Rochelle *en route* for Quebec, the proud capital of the infant colony of New France. The first week all had gone well. Favoring winds seemed to warrant the hope of a quick and comfortable passage across the vast watery plain that separated the Old World from the New. But as the tiny vessel proceeded on her adventuresome way, the mood of the sea altered. Boisterous gales burst suddenly from

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the north, bringing with them the chill gathered from the surface of countless miles of ice and snow. The water changed from a friendly blue to a menacing gray, and heaved itself against the ship in angry waves that drove her far from her course. After many days of buffeting and arduous tacking the sturdy *L'Ardente* passed out of this region of storm, only to glide into another more terrifying; for as she advanced upon her way, she encountered her old enemy, the fog. At last even this mysterious foe was vanquished, and one bright day early in June, 1689, the dim outlines of a strange coast were sighted.

The passengers, who had led a miserable existence a large proportion of the voyage, cooped up in their stuffy quarters below decks, crowded to the rail and strained their eyes to catch a glimpse of the new country whither they were bound.

The speaker was a man past middle age, whose mustache, well streaked with gray, but partly concealed a mouth which bore a gracious smile,

## A STRANGE WELCOME

one that betokened a friendly feeling and invited confidence. He had been gazing with the rest at the faint contour against the sky that denoted land, but, tiring of this, had turned to observe his fellow passengers. His eyes had fallen upon the figures of two boys standing a little apart from the crowd, whose wistful glances betrayed their joy at the journey's progress. A strong family resemblance indicated that they were brothers. The elder, about fifteen, was tall for his age, with a sturdy frame which gave promise of development into a splendid physique by the time the owner reached maturity. The other, some three years younger, was of a slighter build, but bore an air of gentle manly independence that indicated a brave heart and kindly disposition.

The larger boy looked up with a smile of recognition, for he had often noticed the speaker during the voyage and had returned his polite bow when they chanced to meet, although they had never before exchanged any words.

*"Certainement, monsieur,"* he replied.

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"One does not naturally enjoy the foretaste of purgatory that we have received during the past weeks. I shall be content never again to cross the ocean when once I shall put foot on land."

"*Parbleu!* This must be your first voyage. And yet I wonder a little at your evident disgust at the sea, for I have observed you were both excellent sailors, while I have been more or less sick from the day we started. This is my fifth journey across, and yet I am always miserable."

"Perhaps it is because we come of a seafaring race. Our ancestors for many generations back have been followers of the sea," was the proud reply. "I am inclined to doubt, however, the claim of my brother Jean here to our family name, because for three whole days he could not hold up his head."

"I believe, monsieur," spoke up Jean with a smile, "that if Pierre had always *looked* as he really *felt* he would have presented a miserable appearance during a good part of our voyage.

## A STRANGE WELCOME

It was only his strong will that prevented him from betraying his real feelings."

The stranger laughed. "Whither are you bound, if I may be permitted to ask so personal a question?"

"To Quebec," was Jean's ready answer.

Pierre, reassured by the polite demeanor of their new acquaintance, proceeded to enlighten him still further. "You see," he began, "my father came to New France three years ago to join his brother in a trading enterprise. Our uncle, being an officer in the Colonial Army, was prohibited from openly engaging in trade, so he advanced a sum of money and formed a partnership with my father, who was the one actively engaged in the business of buying furs from the Indians, collecting and storing them, and shipping them to France. A year ago he disappeared, carried off and murdered by the savages. Our mother was heartbroken at the news, and never recovered from the shock. She died within six months. Unfortunately we had but little money and no near relatives, so we were ad-

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vised to set sail for Quebec to find our uncle, who will undoubtedly aid us in making a start in the New World. Jean is not very strong, and cannot do much work yet, but I can work enough for two," and as he spoke Pierre laid an affectionate hand upon his brother's shoulder.

"Bravo!" exclaimed the stranger, who seemed much interested in Pierre's narrative. "You have courage and an unselfish heart, a rare combination in this wicked world, one that will stand you in good stead in your new home. But tell me," he continued thoughtfully, "what was your father's name? I live in Quebec, and have something to do with the fur trade. Perchance I knew him?"

"Oh, monsieur!" cried Pierre eagerly, "perhaps you were his friend. His name was Antoine Bordeleau."

"Ah, yes, I remember him well!" replied the stranger. "Then your uncle must be Captain Louis Bordeleau."

"Yes," said Jean. "He was considerably older than my father and entered the army when

## A STRANGE WELCOME

very young. We have never seen him. He does not even know we are coming."

The stranger was silent. He looked moodily off across the water for a moment, then eyed his companions in a hesitating manner, as though he were about to tell them something. He checked himself, however, and turned his gaze seaward again. Presently he spoke in the same kindly tone as before.

"I am indeed glad to meet the sons of my former friend, whose strange disappearance was a much-talked-of mystery at Quebec until your uncle discovered an Indian from a far distant tribe who related to the Governor Frontenac himself the horrible account of the death by torture of a certain white prisoner at the hands of his people, and furnished satisfactory details that proved the identity of the unfortunate man. I shall take pleasure upon our arrival in presenting you to your uncle. He is perhaps a trifle—well, eccentric, but I have no doubt you will get along well enough with him and he will do his duty toward you."

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The next day the ship passed so near the shore that the passengers were able to distinguish an occasional fisherman's cabin, a small clearing covered with growing grain, or the clustered huts of an Indian village. Soon they entered the mouth of the St. Lawrence, the majestic stream that drained a continent. Gradually the opposite shore grew nearer as they ascended until at last, one beautiful clear morning when the voyagers appeared on deck, they beheld in the distance the spires and roofs of the noble city of Quebec, that, seated like a monarch upon a rocky throne, ruled all the fair colony of the King of France.

All was confusion on board ship, the passengers hastily collecting their belongings preparatory to landing; officers bawling orders at the top of their voices; sailors running hither and thither, scrubbing decks, coiling ropes, and getting the vessel into a trim and tidy condition. At noon a cannon was fired, and the answering salute reverberated from the lofty citadel. The anchor was dropped and sails furled, and the



## A STRANGE WELCOME

weary passengers realized that at last their long journey was at an end.

A swarm of canoes put out from the shore and soon surrounded the ship, each one containing an eager gesticulating owner, who offered for a small sum to land his passengers in safety together with their personal effects. Pierre and Jean, each with his little bundle containing all that he possessed in the world, stood watching the confusion with curious eyes. They were interrupted by the familiar voice of the stranger.

“ Well, *mes amis*, are you ready to disembark and begin your adventures in a strange land? ” Not waiting for a reply, he hailed one of the canoes, and, directing the two boys to descend, he followed with their bundles, and soon all three were speeding rapidly over the surface of the water toward the landing place. They found this to be a rude sort of pier, which was crowded with people assembled to welcome the new arrivals. Soldiers, sailors, fishermen, women with children in their arms or tugging at their skirts, a few Indians, officers, even the great Frontenac,

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Governor of all New France—stood ready to offer a hearty greeting to friends and strangers alike.

Their companion passed quietly through the crowd, closely followed by Pierre and Jean Bordeleau. They found themselves walking up a steep street that ran from the lower town to the upper, where were situated the public buildings and most of the residences of the better class. The ascent was tiresome to their stiffened limbs after so many weeks of inactivity on ship-board, and they stopped when halfway up to rest and look back upon the river and the lower town, now lying some distance beneath them. After a few minutes' observation they continued the ascent.

When the upper town was reached, their guide led them rapidly along a street until he stopped before a shop bearing the name of Ormesson.

“Enter, *mes amis*, and welcome to New France. You have told me your names ere now, but are ignorant of mine. This is the home, the shop of Jacques Ormesson, trader, at your serv-

## A STRANGE WELCOME

ice. Enter, I say, and do me the honor of partaking of your first meal in the Colony beneath my roof."

They obeyed, and, following his lead, passed through the shop, and soon found themselves in a little sitting room at the rear. Their host excused himself a moment to receive the greetings of his assistant, a young man whose eyes fairly danced with delight as he beheld once more the sight of his beloved master. He was quickly dispatched for something to eat, and in a half hour the kind-hearted trader and his two young friends were seated about a generous table, attacking vigorously the food provided, with tremendous appetites, the young assistant beaming joyfully as he waited upon them.

When they had finished Jacques Ormesson poured out three glasses of wine and, turning to the two boys, said:

"What say you to a toast, *mes braves garçons*? Here is a pledge to our friendship so happily begun; may it increase with the passing of the days!"

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The glasses were emptied, Pierre and Jean murmuring their thanks. "And now," continued their host, "we must be off to make the acquaintance of your uncle. *Ma foi!* I do not relish the task!"

After a few moments' walk, they stopped before a large house near the edge of the town while their guide knocked sharply for entrance. They were admitted by a decrepit old man, who bowed low to the trader and stared hard at his companions, and were ushered into a large room, separated from another by huge folding doors.

"Tell Captain Bordeleau that Jacques Ormeson, just arrived from France, wishes to see him on a matter of importance." Then turning to the boys he added in an undertone: "I shall go in first and prepare him for the unexpected news of your arrival. I shall then leave, and you can meet your uncle alone. Do not fail to call upon me if you are ever in need. Remember, I am your friend. Come to my shop in a few days and report how you are getting on. Anyone will direct you to the place."

## A STRANGE WELCOME

By this time the old servant had returned and signified that his master would see his visitor at once. Opening one of the doors into the adjoining room he bowed the trader in, closed the door behind him, then shuffled off into another part of the house without deigning to notice the two lonely boyish figures at the farther end of the room.

Pierre and Jean looked about them wonderingly, but could see little in the gloomy apartment in which they sat. They had barely begun to distinguish some of its furnishings when their attention was attracted by the sound of voices. They recognized the low tones of Jacques Ormesson, which were constantly interrupted by the deeper sounds of their uncle's voice. Suddenly this was raised in a volley of articulate oaths, followed by a torrent of angry speech, a portion of which they were able to understand.

"Ten thousand devils!" came clearly to their ears. "What interest have I in Antoine's brats? I will have naught to do with them!"

Then came the voice of the trader in mur-

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mured explanation, followed by more of Captain Bordeleau's indistinct wrathful ejaculations. Finally the conversation ceased. A door was quietly opened and closed and the retreating steps of Jacques Ormesson were heard in the hall. They were alone. No friend was with them to be present at the coming interview. Pierre and Jean looked at one another in silence, then at the door. The knob turned. Jean clutched Pierre's arm nervously. The door swung open, and Captain Bordeleau stood before them.

## CHAPTER II

IN WHICH IT IS DISCOVERED THAT PIERRE POSSESSES  
COMMENDABLE SPIRIT AND JEAN RECEIVES A  
FRIGHT

HE was a man of commanding figure, tall and straight as an Indian bowstring, the result of his military training. At a second glance, however, one perceived that he was a trifle overheavy, his flesh flabby and lacking in firmness, probably due to excessive indulgence in meat and drink and lack of sufficient exercise. His hands and features betokened, in general, good birth and breeding. His eyes, however, betrayed an ignoble character, for they were not those of a frank and honest man. They seldom met openly the gaze of one to whom he spoke, preferring to rest upon the other's neckcloth or a button of his waistcoat; only occasionally did they seek his face, and then with a furtive look. In their depths there lurked a constant menace, as though

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their owner were at war with all the world; a menace that would blaze forth at the slightest provocation.

He gazed silently for a moment at the two lads, who arose at his entrance and stood respectfully before him.

"Well, so you are my brother's children," he said at length in a voice of great depth and peculiar tone, more like the growl of an angry animal than of human origin. "What brought you here?"

"A ship, monsieur," answered Jean innocently.

Captain Bordeleau turned quickly upon him with a snarl. "What have we here? A wit, eh? I hate a wit. A ship, forsooth! I thought you walked."

Jean, terrified at this outbreak, shrank still closer to Pierre, who endeavored to cover up his unfortunate remark by saying:

"Monsieur Ormesson, whom we met on the voyage, may have told you that our mother died a few months ago, leaving us entirely alone and



## PIERRE AND JEAN

almost penniless. You were our nearest relative, so, after selling what remained of our household goods, we took passage for Quebec."

"Expecting me to support you in idleness the rest of my life and make you my heirs when I died?" was the sneering reply.

"No, monsieur, hoping only that for our father's sake you would aid us in getting a start in the New World. I am ready for hard work now, and Jean will be also in a few years more."

His uncle made no reply, but throwing back the heavy curtain allowed the light to fall upon his two nephews, then looked at them searchingly.

"You," he at length said, addressing Pierre, "are like your father, and are a true Bordeleau. But you," turning to Jean with disapproval, "are not. I presume you favor your mother, that lowborn country wench your father was fool enough to marry."

Pierre flushed red and controlled himself with difficulty. "You cannot be a true Bordeleau yourself, monsieur, or you would know that it

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is not the part of a gentleman to insult the memory of a woman his equal in birth, and evidently immeasurably his superior in heart and disposition. If that is your feeling toward our mother we will not remain with you longer, but will seek the protection of Monsieur Ormesson, who I know will do everything he can to aid us. Surely with my two hands ready and able to labor hard we need not starve, even in New France," and the boy's eye gleamed and his bosom heaved with suppressed emotion.

"And have it noised about Quebec by my enemies that I have driven you forth, refusing shelter to my dead brother's children?" Then after a moment of silence the man continued, changing his tone and manner into something more cordial.

"*Ma foi!* but you have a pretty spirit that I like. It was an ungentle speech, for which I apologize to you both. Your mother I never saw, and do not even know her maiden name. Doubtless it was the report of some lying tongue that prejudiced me. Forget what has been said,

## PIERRE AND JEAN

I pray you. Remain with me and let me show that I can fulfill my duty to you both. Come, *mes amis*, there is my hand. True gentility is as ready to accept reparation when offered as it is to resent injury under provocation."

Pierre's anger vanished at this manly speech, while the fear in Jean's heart was changed to a feeling of reassurance. They both seized their uncle's hand in a hearty grasp that betokened their ready pardon for his rough words.

"Now you will want to get settled in your own room." Captain Bordeleau rang a bell; when the old servant appeared he ordered him to show the young gentlemen upstairs, saying that he would follow shortly.

The boys found that the room to which they had been assigned was in the second story, overlooking a small back garden, bounded in the rear by a low stone wall. The room itself was large, with high walls and massive furniture of an old-fashioned but good Paris make. The window was large, and in its embrasure was built a low seat, where one could kneel and gaze out across

### COMRADES THREE

the roofs of the neighboring buildings to the broad waters of the river and the wooded shore opposite, or sit and read with one's hand resting easily against the woodwork and the light streaming over either shoulder.

Both were greatly pleased at the comfortable, almost luxurious surroundings. They were in the midst of a more detailed examination of the furnishings, commenting in a low tone to one another at what they saw, when Jean, who chanced to raise his eyes toward the door, gave a sudden cry of terror, and, retreating into the farthest corner, tried to get behind the bed. Pierre wheeled about in the direction indicated by his brother's gaze, and started back in spite of his greater self-control, hastily putting a large chair between himself and the door. The object that was the cause of this sudden consternation was a human face peering in at them. A human face it was, but entirely different from anything that either of the boys had ever seen before. Jet black was the color of the skin; the lips were red and thick, very much protruded; a

## PIERRE AND JEAN

grinning smile revealed a double row of immense glistening white teeth; while about the head was tied in a sort of turban, a bright red cloth dotted with white.

Before another movement was made by anyone in this strange tableau the face of Captain Bordeleau appeared behind the strange apparition. He recognized the situation at a glance and burst into a hearty peal of laughter. Entering the room, he seated himself, still laughing.

“So you were startled by what must have seemed an imp from the realm of Satan himself! No wonder, perhaps, if you have never seen a black man before. But be reassured, he would not harm a fly. It is only Bolo. Poor Bolo was an African slave in one of the English Colonies, who was carried off by the Indians on a marauding foray. When I found him on a visit to one of the tribes they were about to kill him by torture, believing him to be in league with evil spirits. They had already cut out his tongue. I bought him of their head chief, and he has been a faithful servant ever since. He, of course, can-

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not talk, but understands French perfectly. Come, Jean, and make friends with Bolo.\* Bolo, these are two new masters for you. They will treat you kindly, and you must serve them well."

Jean, now completely reassured, came nearer to the negro, although he still viewed him with curiosity. Bolo grinned amicably, placed his hand over his heart and made a low obeisance to the two strangers, touching the floor three times with his forehead in token of submission.

During the evening meal Captain Bordeleau made every effort possible to promote a cordial feeling between himself and his nephews, and to obliterate all recollection in their minds of the unpleasantness of their first interview. He related droll escapades of his early service in the Continental wars; narrated vividly numerous adventures in the Colonial campaigns against the English; and held his hearers spellbound with blood-curdling tales of incidents of Indian warfare. When the table was finally cleared, and each sat with his filled wineglass before him, he silently filled and lighted a pipe and, after blow-

## PIERRE AND JEAN

ing a few preliminary puffs of the fragrant tobacco above his head, began a conversation of a more personal nature.

“I have been thinking over the matter of your future since your arrival, and have come to certain conclusions. When your father died, his share of our last trading venture was not nearly sufficient to pay back his indebtedness to me that had accumulated for several years. But,” he continued with a deprecating gesture, as he saw that Pierre was about to speak, “I will not charge that up against either of you. Death pays all debts as well as heals all wounds. I prefer that you should start with a clean balance sheet in your new life. My position as an officer forbids my engaging openly in trade, hence what I have accomplished in that line since your father’s death has had to be done secretly. My idea is to fit you both, so that you can eventually take your father’s place. You, Jean, will need a few more years at school, so that you can learn to figure correctly. I shall place you in the care of one of the monks from the Seminary when win-

### COMRADES THREE

ter comes on. In the meantime you had better take advantage of the summer weather in order to grow strong and hearty. The winters here are long and severe. You, too, Pierre, can run wild until your brother begins his schooling. Then I shall instruct you in the mysteries of the fur trade. Until then I wish you both to learn as much as you can about the woods, the wild animals and their haunts—all of which will be of service to you in your future business. I shall provide you each with firearms and place you in charge of some competent person, who will instruct you in the knowledge of woodcraft. For the first few years your services will not be worth much to me, but you can have your home here. When you really become valuable I shall arrange a fair remuneration for you both.”

Pierre and Jean both broke forth into expressions of gratitude, but their uncle waved them aside with a smile.

“*Ma-foi!* Would you expect me to do less for my own flesh and blood? Be diligent and faithful to me and I shall feel fully repaid. And



## PIERRE AND JEAN

now," he continued, as he arose and lifted his wineglass, "I doubt not but you are fatigued after the excitement of the day and will be glad to seek your rest. Before you retire, will you not pledge with me this beginning of our friendly relations; may they continue long!"

Pierre drained his glass manfully, Jean touched his lips to his, and soon they were both asleep, dreaming of the many strange experiences of this their first day in the New World. Jean saw now and then the grinning face of Bolo, while Pierre moved uneasily, the hidden menace in his uncle's eyes, seen at their first interview, continually recurring to his dreaming fancy.

## CHAPTER III

SHOWS HOW THE RECITAL OF WARLIKE DEEDS  
AROUSES AMBITIOUS DESIRES IN THE MINDS OF  
THE HEARERS

THE bright rays of the morning sun falling on the face of Pierre caused him to awaken with a start and look for a moment with a dazed expression at his strange surroundings. The quick recollection of the events of the previous day soon reassured him, and after rousing his brother, he leaped from his bed eager to meet whatever adventures his new life might bring him. Together the two lads stood before the open window looking out over the city, and watching the early morning mists as they swept upward from the surface of the river far below, rapidly dissipated by the ever-increasing warmth of the sun. They remained there some moments looking at the unaccustomed scene, and

## AMBITIOUS DESIRES

breathing in the intoxicating draughts of cool, clear air that sent the blood tingling through every part. Then they quickly dressed and descended to the dining room, where they found their uncle just seating himself before a plain but substantial breakfast. He greeted them heartily, inquired politely as to their comfort during the night, and motioned them to their places at the table. He then busied himself with some papers that he had brought with him, apparently oblivious of their presence. Finally he arose when he had finished his meal and turning to Pierre said:

“I have important matters that will occupy me to-day, so I shall be compelled to leave you to your own resources. You can wander over the city and acquaint yourself with your future place of residence. There is no danger of your getting lost. You will not find Quebec a very large place. As for you, youngster,” he exclaimed, as he playfully pinched Jean’s ear in passing, “be careful you do not fall off the parapet of the fort into the Lower Town. If you did,

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I fear there would not be enough of you left to pick up afterwards."

When Captain Bordeleau took his departure the boys finished their breakfast at their leisure, and strolled forth down the narrow street. Pierre was for making a voyage of discovery alone, but Jean reminded him of their friend of the day before, and suggested that they accept his hearty invitation to make a call upon him at an early date. Pierre good-naturedly consented, and after making a few inquiries they found themselves again entering the shop of the friendly Jacques Ormesson. That worthy trader gave them a cordial welcome. He led them back to his little private room, so that their conversation would not be overheard.

"Tell me," he said with interest, "how your interview with your worthy uncle turned out. He was much disturbed when I told him of your arrival. No wonder, perhaps, for he is an old bachelor, who has always lived by himself, and I doubt not, when I announced that his brother's children were come to live with him, he had

## AMBITIOUS DESIRES

visions of a couple of infants that would require the attention of a nurse, forming a constant disturbing element in the household. But when I told him your ages and what a manly pair you were, he cooled down considerably. However, I did not envy you the first meeting with him."

Pierre accordingly gave a detailed account of the spirited scene of the day before, omitting nothing. His friend listened attentively. When he came to the insulting speech of Captain Bordeleau he frowned and his brow darkened, but when he heard Pierre's brave answer he broke into a smile, clapped the boy on the shoulder, and exclaimed: "*Ma foi!* a good shot!" When the narrative was finished he remained a moment or two in deep thought, and after muttering, "I do not understand his plan. Perhaps, though, he means well," he congratulated them both on the evident good impression they had made on their uncle, and warned them that they should be careful to merit his favor, as he was in a position to be of great assistance to them if

### COMRADES THREE

he chose to do so, and that it was much wiser to have him for a friend than an enemy. Then, picking up his hat, he continued:

“And now, *mes amis*, what say you to a tour about Quebec with me for guide? I am at liberty this forenoon, and shall be delighted to go with you.”

For answer Jean tossed his cap in the air with delight. Pierre, on his part, started to express his thanks, but Ormesson interrupted him by placing an arm about each boy's shoulders in an affectionate manner, and saying gravely: “Nothing I can do for either of you will be other than a pleasure. My life had grown hard and empty until you entered it. Already you have brought into it a joy and interest I have not known for many years. My greatest grief has been that my girl wife did not leave me a son before she died, just such a son as either of you. But God is good. Perhaps I was unworthy so great a gift.”

A few moments later they were on their way, their friend pointing out the various strange

## AMBITIOUS DESIRES

sights with a word of explanation or personal reminiscence.

“Yonder in the distance is the Intendant’s Palace, the home of the king’s officer, who is second only in authority to the Governor. This side of it you will see the spire of the Hôtel Dieu or hospital where the good nurses care for the sick. Near at hand is the Jesuit College, while in front of us is the Cathedral.”

A little farther on they came into an open space.

“What square is this? It looks as though it would make an excellent drilling ground for the soldiers,” cried Jean, his face beaming with interest.

“*Parbleu!* but you have made a good guess. This is called the Place d’Armes, and is used for the purpose you supposed. But it has other uses,” continued Ormesson, with a twinkle in his eye, “for here it is that they will lead you some fine morning if you should prove a traitor to the King, and stand you up to be shot at by a file of soldiers; an unpleasant incident that

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would tend to mar your career in the New World."

Jean gave an involuntary shudder. The trader pointed to a building on the farther side of the square. "That," he said, "is the Fort. The portion facing us we call the Château St. Louis, and is the residence of the Governor, the famous Comte Frontenac, as wise a ruler and as valiant a soldier as the Colony has ever seen. I shall take you around to the other side, which is the fort proper, the crowning fortification of this huge rock on which the Upper Town is built, and the first object visible to our eyes as we ascended the river yesterday."

In a few moments the three were standing upon the rampart of the fort. Immediately beneath them lay the roofs of the Lower Town, some two hundred feet below, from whose chimneys the smoke lazily arose until wafted away by the upper air currents. Farther on stretched the placid surface of the St. Lawrence, deserted now of all craft save the good ship that had brought them safely across the seas. Beyond



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stretched the wooded border of the opposite shore, a mile and more away. Above them fluttered idly the white *fleur-de-lis* banner that announced to all the world that this wide expanse of wood and river and mountain, stretching in all directions for countless leagues, belonged to the King of France. A silence pervaded all, broken only by the distant muffled sounds of human activity in the Lower Town or the barking of some vagrant dog by the river's edge. The only sign of military life was a solitary sentinel slowly pacing his lonely beat a hundred feet distant from the little group.

The three surveyed with mingled feelings of awe and pleasure the beauty and grandeur of the scene. At length Pierre, whose attention had been attracted by the moving soldier, asked:

"If, as you say, the Comte Frontenac was such a valiant soldier, why did the King visit him with disgrace some years ago by recalling him?"

"That," replied Ormesson feelingly, "was done through his enemies who, together with his Intendant, Duchesneau, sent lying letters to the

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King, alleging that the difficulties that beset the Colony were due to his mal-administration. That this was untrue was quickly shown by the fact that under the new governor, La Barre, matters only became worse. His successor, Denonville, brought affairs to such a terrible pass that, in despair, the King, realizing that he had misjudged his faithful servant, besought Frontenac to return once more and attempt to bring order out of the chaos that had arisen since his departure."

"I think I should like to be a soldier instead of engaging in the fur trade," said Pierre meditatively, still watching the sentry as he paced up and down.

"It is a hard lot, but a noble one," exclaimed Ormesson fervently. "What can be nobler than to gain this fair land for our great King, teaching and converting the savages, opening up new territory and a new life for the multitudes of unfortunate ones in France who otherwise can never hope to achieve anything amid the narrow conditions in which they live. Would that I were

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thirty years younger, and I would devote all my youthful energies in the King's service instead of the one campaign in which I participated."

"Have you, then, really fought against the English or the Indians?" asked Jean in admiration and surprise.

"Yes, last winter. It was my first and last attempt in that direction. One must have not only a brave heart but a strong constitution to withstand the privations of Colonial warfare. I am fit at my age only to help garrison the city should it ever be attacked."

The two boys were now eagerly listening, forgetful of the scene before them. It was a great treat to hear the recital of military activity in the New World from the lips of one who had been a participator.

"The trouble began," continued the trader, who, pleased at the interest displayed, warmed to his subject as a flood of recollections entered his mind, "by the vacillating policy of the former Governor Denonville. The redskins, formerly kept in check by the firm grasp of Frontenac,

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quickly realized that they had a different master to deal with. The atrocities they committed against some of the outlying settlements remained unpunished. Urged on by the English at Albany, who supplied them with rum, gunpowder, and bullets, they grew more and more troublesome, until finally they assumed an attitude of defiance and hostility toward the French, openly taking their furs to the English traders, and often professing allegiance to the King of England. They even approached the outskirts of Montreal and Quebec in their attacks, killing many of the French settlers and taking hundreds away prisoners to be tortured and eaten at their convenience."

Pierre scowled and murmured "The wretches!" between his set teeth.

"But all was changed when, a year ago, Frontenac arrived as Governor, displacing the inefficient Denonville. He quietly reorganized the military force at his disposal, secured the coöperation of some friendly Indians, and prepared for action. Realizing that the savages received

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their chief support from the English, he decided to strike a decisive blow against these allies of the redskins. He accordingly dispatched three expeditions: One against the settlements in Maine, another against those in New Hampshire, while a third was directed against the important post at Albany. It was this last one that I joined at the head of about fifty of my trusty trappers or *coureurs-de-bois*. It was in the depth of winter that we started, hoping to surprise the enemy, who, we believed, would never dream of our venturing forth at that time of year. We passed over the frozen surface of the St. Lawrence and through the forest on snowshoes, each with his head enveloped in the hood of his warm coat, a bullet pouch at his belt, a hatchet, knife, and tobacco pouch at the waist, while in our hands, protected by huge mittens, were our trusty guns. The provisions, supplies, and ammunition we dragged behind us over the snow on sledges. Finally we arrived at the Richelieu River and, passing over it, soon reached Lake Champlain.

“In about two weeks’ time we came to the Hud-

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son, not far from Albany. Here we decided to attack the post as Schenectady instead, as it was almost impossible to advance farther in the direction in which we were going. A thaw set in, and we were compelled to wade knee-deep through the half-melted snow and ice and a part of the way through swampy ground."

The silence about them had deepened. It was the noon hour when the inhabitants of the city ceased their labor and partook of their midday meal. The two auditors were engrossed so deeply in the story that they had no thought for the passage of time.

"Suddenly the weather changed. It grew bitterly cold and a heavy snowstorm fell. We faced westward, and advanced rapidly in our determination to reach our destination before the enemy learned of our approach. We were all half-dead with hunger, but we dared not stop to prepare food; we were worn out with fatigue, but we had nothing but deep snowdrifts in which to rest; we were well-nigh frozen, but we feared to light a fire lest it betray us. The storm in-

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creased, so that we could see but a few yards ahead of us as we stumbled on. At length night fell just as our scouts descried the palisade that surrounded the village.

“About eleven o'clock we approached the two gates. Imagine our surprise to find them open, and in front of each stood a snow man with a stick in his hand. These had been made in fun by the soldiers guarding the gates, who, never dreaming of a surprise, had retired to warmer quarters on account of the storm. Rapidly we entered the village, keeping silence until every house was surrounded. Then, at a given signal, our Indians raised their war whoops and attacked the doors with their hatchets, while we fired in at the windows. There was little resistance save at the blockhouse, where we met with a stubborn fight. But finally it was captured, its defenders killed, and the building set on fire. Fires were soon built, and we were able for the first time in two days to warm our stiffened hands. A guard was set and we entered the houses, satisfied our ravenous appetites, and sought much-

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needed sleep. The next day we set out with nearly a hundred prisoners on our return march, before the news of our attack could reach Albany and reënforcements be sent. The whole town was fired, and by the light of the burning buildings we started homeward. As a number of days passed without any signs of pursuit we became somewhat careless, until, when we had almost reached Montreal, we were attacked at night by a small party of English from Albany who had followed on our trail, and some fifteen of our number killed. This was the only mishap, and we finally arrived at Quebec in safety after having inflicted a terrible blow upon the English that would tend for years to come to keep them from interfering with our fur trade, and would strike terror into the souls of the redskins who had wavered in their allegiance to the French."

The two boys breathed deeply when their companion finished, and remained silent on their way home. Late that night, as they were falling asleep, Pierre whispered to his brother the determination that he had made during the day.



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“As soon as I am grown I shall become a soldier and fight against the English and the cruel savages.” He was much astonished at Jean’s sleepy answer: “So am I. But I am not going to wait that long.”

## CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH A NEW ACQUAINTANCE IS MADE AND  
A NEW LIFE BEGUN

THE next morning the two boys breakfasted alone. When they had finished they amused themselves for an hour or more watching the passers-by from the windows of the large front room into which they had been ushered on their first arrival, and talking over in a low tone the tale of warlike adventure they had listened to the day before. They were interrupted in this by the sight of Captain Bordeleau walking rapidly along the street toward the house. With him was a half-grown youth of about seventeen, tall and lithe, whose free swinging stride, bronzed cheek, and well-developed chest would have betrayed the woodsman had not his attire made the fact certain. His garments were those of the trapper, or *coureur-de-bois* as they were termed,

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of rough, coarse material, well calculated to resist the attack of brier and thorn, the pelt-  
ing of the rain, and the fury of the wind,  
which even in the summer storms was often chill  
and penetrating. His cap was of fur, from one  
side of which the broad tail feather of some bird  
of prey projected upward and backward, giving  
a jaunty air to its otherwise heavy appearance.

A moment later the two had entered the room.  
Without further preamble Captain Bordeleau in-  
troduced his companion to the two boys.

“This is Francois Ledun, son of a *censitaire*  
whose farm lies about a league from Quebec.  
He is well versed in all the mysteries of wood-  
craft and hunting, having lived in the forest all  
his life. I have engaged him to act as your com-  
panion for the summer to instruct you along the  
lines that will be useful to you later on in the fur  
trade. He will live at home, but come to the  
city every day. After a little he will take you  
on short expeditions, in order that you may fa-  
miliarize yourselves with this new method of liv-  
ing. I trust that you will prove yourselves apt

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pupils. I have instructed him to provide you with the necessary weapons and clothing."

With these words and a friendly wave of the hand he disappeared in his private room, leaving the three youths together.

François stood awkwardly fingering his cap in embarrassed silence. His solitary outdoor existence had tended to make him diffident in the presence of strangers. The two brothers eyed him for a time, themselves bashful before one whose life had been placed in such a different sphere from their own. Their first impression of him was, however, wholly favorable. His frank look, keen eye, and friendly smile, together with an enviable strength of frame and glow of perfect health, were undoubtedly attractive, and gave promise of a long and agreeable companionship.

Pierre was the first to make an advance. Approaching the stranger he extended his hand and said simply:

"I am glad to meet you, François. I am Pierre Bordeleau, and this is my brother Jean."

## A NEW ACQUAINTANCE

François's confusion vanished, and he returned their hearty grasp. Soon all three were conversing as easily as though they had been old acquaintances. It was the first time that the country-bred youth had ever met anyone of his own age who had come across the seas from that strange motherland he had heard and read so much about. Their eyes had gazed upon the noble cities, the busy streets and wharves, the hurrying crowd, and all the splendors of the older civilization. They had perhaps beheld famous generals coming home from foreign wars victorious, and had heard the welcoming shouts of the enthusiastic populace. Perchance even they had seen some members of that mysterious circle who lived their exalted lives in close contact with that glorious personality the King. The two brothers on their part looked with curiosity upon one who knew the secrets of the forest and the trail, who had met the wild beasts in their native haunts, who had seen the cruel and crafty savages, and perhaps had had encounters with them. That some such thoughts were in

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their minds was evidenced by their first questions.

"Did you ever kill a bear, an old one, I mean, not a cub?" was Jean's eager inquiry.

"Yes, before I was your age," was the quiet answer. Jean's eyes opened wider in admiration. "How?"

"By putting a bullet where it would do the most good," replied François, laughing at his companion's astonishment.

Pierre, although surprised, felt that it would not do to appear overawed.

"Pooh! that would be easy. If you got behind a tree, a bear, however big, could not hurt you. All you would have to do would be to shoot him before he got too near. Now a redskin is another matter. Have you ever shot an Indian?"

"No," was François's answer, delivered in a serious tone. "As you say, that is another matter. And I hope I shall never have to. This scar on my forehead was made by an Indian arrow when I was a baby. My father was barely able

## A NEW ACQUAINTANCE

to reach a place of safety with his family in one of their attacks. But I should not be afraid to try if it were necessary," he added bravely.

Thus they talked on, François good-naturedly answering the eager questionings of his two companions. At last he stopped as the distant bell from the clock at the Château was heard chiming the hour.

"Your uncle told me to take you without delay and see that you were properly fitted out. Will you not come with me now?"

The two boys gave eager assent, and soon all were standing in a shop before a bewildering collection of clothing, weapons, and the thousand and one things that made up the stock of the Quebec tradesmen. Two suits were quickly selected, and found to be satisfactory. Jean spied a cap almost identical with that belonging to François, which he chose, promising himself to select just such a feather as he wore from the first large bird that he killed. A good heavy gun was taken by Pierre, while a lighter piece was selected for Jean. Powder horns and bul-

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let pouches quickly followed. At François's suggestion two hunting knives were bought. Jean chose one with a broad, keen blade that would prove admirable for slitting the throats of deer or moose or skinning their slain carcasses, while Pierre picked out one the shape of a dirk, whose sharp point promised well for a hand-to-hand conflict with an Indian. A quantity of powder and bullets was also bought, and the purchases taken home.

After dinner Jean and Pierre hastily donned their new clothes and eagerly assented to François's proposal that they should take their first lesson in marksmanship. Passing out of the city, they followed the river bank for a half a league until they came to a level, half-cleared spot that seemed suitable for the purpose. François then instructed them in the proper method of loading their guns, and pointing out a knot on a tree some fifty yards away as a target took steady aim and fired. On going to the spot they discovered the bullet firmly embedded in the wood in the very center of the knot.



## A NEW ACQUAINTANCE

“That did not look very difficult,” cried Pierre. “Although I have never shot a gun before I believe I could do nearly as well.”

Going back to their original standing place he raised his weapon. But somehow when he attempted to sight along the barrel, as he had seen François do, he found that the muzzle seemed possessed, for it absolutely refused to stay still, but wobbled about in an unaccountable manner. Finally he thought he had the mark exactly covered and pulled the trigger. A twig falling from a limb of the tree some ten feet higher than the knot showed how far the bullet had gone astray. He looked at his companions with a mortified air, then laughed. “Had that been a redskin I should probably never have had the opportunity of making a second shot,” he exclaimed. “Now, Jean, it is your turn.”

Jean, who to tell the truth was a little afraid of his gun, took as careful aim as he could, shut his eyes, and fired. His bullet struck the tree trunk a yard below the knot.

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Pierre, a little nettled at being thus beaten by his younger brother, turned to François.

“Your shot was all very fine, but when you are hunting live things they will not stand still for you to shoot at. Can you do as well with a moving object?”

For reply François pointed to a black speck in the sky. As they waited it became larger, and they soon perceived it to be a hawk, soaring lazily in the air far above them. He waited until it was directly overhead before he raised his gun. The sound of its report had scarcely subsided when the bird struck the ground at their feet, dead with its head pierced by the swift bullet.

Pierre ran up to their new-made friend and seized his hand. “Forgive me, François,” he exclaimed with enthusiasm, “for being envious of your skill. It is wonderful!”

François reddened with pleasure. “That is nothing,” he said; “in time you should be able to do as well as I.”

The next week or two were spent in daily care-

## A NEW ACQUAINTANCE

ful practice, in which a great deal of powder and shot was wasted, but with results highly gratifying to all parties. Gradually Pierre obtained better and better control over his gun, while even Jean learned not to flinch when he pulled the trigger. Their sport was sometimes varied by instructions in the art of canoeing. The shallow, still waters of the St. Charles, that emptied into the St. Lawrence just below Quebec, afforded an excellent place for the learning of this very necessary portion of a woodsman's education. Extended journeys would be possible only by means of these frail craft. Long swift rivers and their tortuous tributary streams would be thus made easily navigable, and rapid progress to or from the wilderness assured.

The two brothers were excellent swimmers, and were proud of their skill. It was often called into requisition, for both of them in their attention to the elusive paddle stroke, or eagerness to urge the canoe to a higher rate of speed, were apt to forget the necessity of preserving a careful balance, with frequent disastrous results. But

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they swam cheerfully to shore with their overturned craft, drying themselves beside an improvised camp fire, and returning again with unabated zeal to the labor of mastering the secret. Sometimes after several successive duckings they ran home at a dogtrot, tired and soaked, but happy.

At length François announced that they had made sufficient progress in their aquatic and hunting labors to warrant their taking a week's trip into the interior, where they could put into practice the skill they had already acquired, and learn additional mysteries from the woods.

Great was their excitement at this prospect. All their previous efforts had been merely preparatory. Now they were to obtain a real taste of the bold, free, roving life of the silent places. All civilization was to be left behind, and the lonely forest was to be their temporary home. What adventures might they not encounter, what strange experiences would be theirs! A canoe was procured and carefully laden with a stock of provisions and ammunition, and one

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bright July morning they pushed off, entering the St. Charles just as the sun's first rays tipped the flagstaff of the fort. Gradually the city receded from their view, until finally it was lost completely behind a bend of the river, and they were alone in the great wilderness.

## CHAPTER V

### DEVOTED TO LIFE IN THE WOODS AND ENDING IN A CONFLICT

A NEW world unfolded itself before the eyes of the two brothers, a world strange, boundless, fascinating. Beneath and about them was the rushing swirl of the hurrying stream against whose resisting current their eager paddle strokes urged the birch-bark craft. On either side stretched the deep-shadowed silence of the primeval forest in whose depths lurked the wild dwellers of the hidden places, who seemed to the boys' active imagination to glare out at them from the gloom in resentful surprise at this unwarranted intrusion upon their domains. A faint moaning from the wooded depths as the breeze stirred the tree limbs was the only sound that reached their ears from the land, a sound that might easily have been interpreted as being

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either a threatening murmur of disapproval at their advent or a gentle note of welcome, wooing them to leave the bright sunlight of the stream and seek the hidden mysteries of the cool shadows.

Bird life was the only portion of animate nature that was visible. Crows cawed harshly from their perches on the gnarled and naked branches of blasted pines near the water's edge or flapped their huge black wings noisily in their clumsy flight across the stream. The tiny bodies of small birds flashed for an instant as they lightly skimmed the surface of the water, then disappeared as rapidly as they had come.

A sudden turn of the river showed them the quick dive of a gigantic hawk as he drove his claws deeply into the body of an unwary fish and rose heavily into the air with his glistening burden, uttering a glad, free cry of triumph. Up and up above the forest tops he mounted, bent on carrying his prey to some far-off nest. As the boys watched in admiration the strong motion of his powerful wings they heard a harsh, sharp

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scream of anger and saw an eagle, who, unnoticed, had been circling about in the upper air, drop with marvelous rapidity and directness upon the brave hunter of the stream. The hawk heard the scream and saw the huge body of his foe coming down upon him with the speed and accuracy of a bullet. Uttering a cry of mingled fear and rage he dropped his prey and fled. The eagle, content at having made him surrender his prize, continued his rapid downward course until he overtook the falling fish and gripped it with his talons. Then with a mighty effort his descent was stayed and he rose proudly and grandly with magnificent sweep of wing, finally settling upon a distant branch, there to enjoy his stolen meal in comfort.

The human spectators watched the spirited scene breathless with interest, paddling mechanically while their eyes were raised aloft. When all was over they resumed their energetic work in silence, but a thought entered the minds of all three: here was a world where might and cunning alone prevailed; where the strong preyed



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upon the weak; where each succeeding victor was in turn vanquished. And now they had come, men, lords of the earth, with their human skill and ingenuity to conquer even the mightiest of this brute creation. A fierce throb of joy tingled through their veins, the joy of living and achieving, while the desire of conquest thrilled them with its strange pervasive power and nerved them for the accomplishment of brave deeds.

An hour before sunset a point on the river was reached that struck François's fancy as being a suitable place for a camp. They accordingly landed. A grassy spot lying between the river and the shadowy woods was chosen, and they quickly set to work to make their preparations for the night. François ordered the others to collect a large pile of firewood while he unloaded the canoe. When this was accomplished the sunlight had already begun to fade. A fire was then lighted, and soon the three tired travelers were stretched out before its genial warmth busily engaged in satisfying the appetites that

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the day's exercise in the open air had aroused. Soon the last gleam of day disappeared and the stars came out clear and bright. The murmur of the river on one side was for a long time the only sound audible. Gradually, however, stranger murmurs came from the depth of the forest, indefinite, inarticulate, a multitude of voices merged into one. As the evening advanced this noise became louder, and was divided into many distinct sounds, as the creatures of the night awakened and glided forth through the darkened aisles of the woods in search of food.

Pierre and Jean listened attentively, interested and not a little awed by the novelty of their situation. François, whenever a new cry was heard, told them to what animal it belonged. Occasionally a distant crashing in the underbrush betrayed the hurried passage of some large animal, while one far-off scream of agony told of the tragic end of a mortal combat in the darkness. These strange, uncanny sounds made Jean shiver apprehensively more than once, while Pierre

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now and then glanced furtively at their guns, and was glad to see them still close at hand. François, accustomed as he was to the weird mystery of the forest by night, lay unconcernedly before the fire. Soon all three of the boys began to feel the effects of the day's hard work, and their eyelids drooped despite their efforts at conversation. Finally François, after replenishing the fire, rolled himself up in his blanket, and, after bidding his companions follow his example, was sound asleep in a moment.

The night hours passed rapidly. Jean, who was dreaming of an exciting adventure with a wild-cat, awoke suddenly with a start. The fire had died down, making the darkness of the neighboring forest seem very near and threatening. As his eyes opened and rested in confusion upon the blackest spot in his surroundings, he beheld his dream become a reality, for as he gazed in stupefied surprise he saw two large catlike eyes staring fixedly at him. Two yellow balls of flame they were, glowing steadily with a menacing glitter. Jean, feeling himself fascinated by

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the horrible stare, glanced uneasily to the right, only to behold another pair of fiery eyeballs regarding him steadfastly. To the left he turned. There, too, was the same terrifying spectacle. All about them, save only in the direction of the river, ranged a semicircle of glittering eyes, watching, watching in an ominous silence. Terror entered into Jean's soul at this appalling sight, so with a mighty effort to overcome the benumbing fear that had seized him he uttered a piercing cry. François awoke quickly, and seeing from Jean's frightened gaze and pointing finger the cause of his alarm, sprang toward the fire, seized one of the few remaining glowing sticks, and threw it in the direction of the offending eyes. They instantly vanished before this attack, and the sound of snapping twigs betrayed the stealthy retreat of their owners.

François stirred the fire, threw on more fuel, and soon the light from the flames illuminated brightly their surroundings. Seeing how frightened Jean had been, he bade him go to sleep,

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promising that he would stay awake and watch the fire, so as to keep all possible intruders at a distance.

When Jean next opened his eyes it was broad day. Pierre was just beginning to stir, while François knelt before the fire, busily engaged in cooking a couple of fish that he had just caught. Breakfast over, they shouldered their guns and entered the silent shadows of the forest. Here François showed them the trails of several wild animals, explaining carefully their differences. Farther on he pointed out the trunk of a tree that disclosed a number of freshly made scratches on its bark not far from the ground, as the probable recent haunt of a wild cat or lynx. Even as he spoke he raised his gun and directed its aim toward one of the upper limbs. The two boys strained their eyes in their effort to make out what it was that had attracted François's attention, but were at first unsuccessful. Finally Pierre perceived what looked like two tufted ears protruding from behind a large limb. These grew larger, and he saw a pair of greenish-

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yellow eyes peer forth for an instant. This was what François had been waiting for. His gun flashed, and at the same instant a horrid scream, strangely human in its tones, resounded through the forest, and a dark object fell at their feet. On examination it proved to be a full-grown lynx. The bullet hole between the eyes gave evidence of François's accurate aim. "This was probably one of the spies whom you saw watching us last night," he remarked to Jean, who shivered in spite of himself, as he felt the sharp claws of the dead beast.

Thus several days were passed in happy activity. Fresh meat was provided by a lucky distant shot by François at a deer, or a splendid catch from the river. The warm fire at night wooed them into healthy slumber, while the cold plunge in the river at dawn roused them to the day's activity. Gradually the strangeness of their surroundings disappeared for the two brothers, and they strode along through the woods in their daily expeditions with something of the confidence of old hunters, even daring to

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stray off alone at times to investigate some sign that gave promise of good game.

It was while thus engaged in following a strange trail that Jean became separated from his companions. He had not proceeded far when he came suddenly upon the unknown object of his pursuit, a small bear cub. The little fellow, when he perceived he was followed, quickened his clumsy, rolling gait. Jean thought it would be great fun to capture him alive and take him back to Quebec with him. He accordingly made no attempt to shoot, but endeavored merely to catch up with the little beast, a thing he found to be difficult to do. Some time thus elapsed in the pursuit. Finally when Jean had almost come up with the cub he suddenly disappeared. The boy paused and examined carefully the spot where he had last seen him, but without avail. On looking about him he discovered that he had been following a narrow gully whose sides were almost perpendicular. The only explanation he could find for the cub's escape was that he had crept into some hidden hole

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or cave, probably his home. After searching for the entrance to this supposed place of concealment without success, Jean turned to retrace his steps. Then it was that he first realized how long he had been separated from his companions. Obeying his first impulse he gave a loud halloo, hoping that the others might possibly hear him. The echo resounding from the sides of the gully was the only answer. Again he shouted, and was surprised to hear a deep growl in reply, and to behold a huge, full-grown bear emerge from among the trees and come rapidly toward him. Inasmuch as the animal came from the direction in which he wished to go, Jean turned and retreated up the gully.

At first he hoped the bear would give up the chase, as he remembered hearing that they were usually afraid of human beings unless cornered and compelled to fight, or through fear of an attack upon their young. Then it flashed over him that the bear's lair being probably close at hand, his presence might enrage the powerful beast, alarmed lest he harm its cub. He accord-



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ingly retreated rapidly and without formality, but the bear followed steadily after him. He was excited at the adventure, yet laughed aloud at the thought of the figure he must cut as he fled before his pursuer. His mirth was quickly silenced, however, when he suddenly came to the end of the gully—a high, smooth wall of rock, impossible to climb, while the sides were equally inaccessible. He was thus caught in a sort of blind alley, with the bear between him and freedom. Determined to put up as good a fight as he was able, he braced his back against the rock, examined his gun carefully, and awaited the attack. The huge animal came steadily on until it was about ten feet in front of him, when it stopped, and, rising on its haunches, opened wide its jaws and emitted an angry growl. Jean raised his gun and fired. A roar from the infuriated beast showed that it had not been hit in any vital part. Smarting with pain it rushed upon the unfortunate youth with arms outspread to gather him in a deadly embrace.

Time was lacking for Jean to reload. Drop-

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ping his now useless gun, he drew the only other weapon he had with him—his long hunting knife—and prepared for an almost hopeless hand-to-hand encounter. Unless he was able to drive the blade home at the first stroke he would be at the animal's mercy. On it came. The small eyes gleamed with fury while the open jaws moved convulsively in pain caused by Jean's bullet. The paws, armed with long claws, were almost touching him; the hot, sickening breath of the beast reached his nostrils. Then it was that he felt that the time for action had arrived, so with an unflinching heart he met the danger. Seizing his knife with both hands he sprang to meet the bear's embrace, putting all his strength into a stroke aimed at the animal's heart. For an instant his face was buried in the beast's heavy fur; for one long moment he felt the squeeze of the powerful paws as they encircled him. Then the pressure was removed, the hold relaxed, and the huge body, toppling over backward, fell to the ground with a crash. Jean had won the conflict. The keen knife had done its work.

## CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH A GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK IS PLAYED, A  
STRANGE DISCOVERY MADE, AND A COMPACT  
FORMED

WHEN Jean saw the monster, which, a moment before, had been alive and threatening with all the ferocity of its savage nature, lying dead at his feet his heart gave a leap for joy. A distant halloo from his companions recalled him to his surroundings. He gave an answering cry that soon brought them to him.

“Bravo, *mon cher ami!*” exclaimed François, in genuine amazement at his success. Pierre could hardly comprehend for a moment that his brother had actually slain the huge beast with one well-directed blow. When he did, he sprang at Jean and hugged him with as much delight as though he himself had been the successful hunter. François at once proceeded deftly to remove the

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animal's skin, an undertaking which the other two watched with much interest. When this task was completed they set out for camp, which they reached without further adventure. The next morning they started for Quebec, and after a day's vigorous paddling they shot out into the St. Lawrence once more. An hour or two later they arrived at home. Captain Bordeleau had just come in and listened indulgently to the boys' recital of their hunting trip. He examined the bearskin, pronounced it an excellent specimen, and complimented Jean on his success, predicting that ere long he would become a mighty hunter.

In two or three days' time the boys had entirely recovered from the fatigue of their journey and were eager for more sport. François, who had gone home meanwhile, soon returned. He suggested that they should put to practical use some of the knowledge gained in their two weeks in the woods. He led them to the river's edge a mile below Quebec. Here he proposed that Jean should be given a five minutes' start and en-

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deavor to hide himself in the underbrush lining the side of the river and the low bluff adjoining, while he and Pierre should follow him by whatever trail he might leave behind. This was readily assented to, and Jean started off, leaving the other two behind with stopped ears and closed eyes.

When they had waited the length of time agreed upon they opened their eyes and looked about for some trace that would indicate the direction taken. Soon Pierre discovered the impression of Jean's foot in the sand that showed he had started up the river. François allowed Pierre to make all the discoveries he could, offering no aid until he lost the trail. The latter demonstrated that he had been a ready learner of all François had previously taught him, and that his natural powers of observation were keen. Soon he spied a broken branch that directed them a little to the right nearer the bluffs. He became baffled, however, in a few moments not discovering any further indications of Jean's progress, and was compelled to return to the

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point where he first beheld the broken branch, and devote his attention to that vicinity. Soon another trace was found that led them toward the river again. Once more did the trail lead to the underbrush beneath the bluff, which was covered with short stunted bushes and vines. Here Pierre became confused, and was compelled to call upon François for assistance. His companion then directed his attention to two possible routes Jean might have taken. One was blocked by a tiny spider's web. Hence the other must be the correct one. They followed this, and met several confirmatory evidences. Finally a point was reached when even François was puzzled. The trail was as completely lost as though the earth had swallowed Jean up. Around and around they went in ever-widening circles in their endeavors to find some clew, but all in vain. The search was continued through the bushes and vines up to the very base of the bluff, but without success. Breathless they stood, continuing their search with their eyes. At last François exclaimed: "I give it up. He must have

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turned on his track, and we have probably passed him some distance back."

Just then Jean's voice was heard, almost in their ears, it seemed so near. "If you acknowledge yourselves beaten come here and see what I have discovered."

The two boys turned quickly about, and looking upward a trifle they saw Jean's face peering at them from between the leaves of the vine covering the bluff, and at a distance of only a yard from where they were standing.

"Come this way, and be careful not to injure the vine," warned Jean, as he separated some of its branches for the others to pass through. They did so, and much to their astonishment found themselves standing in the entrance of a cave in which Jean had been hiding all the time, watching their discomfiture from behind the leafy screen.

"It was by the merest accident that I found the way in," he explained. "I had stopped a moment to breathe and decide what direction I should take. Looking at this bluff it occurred to

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me to try and draw myself to the top, which you see is only about fifteen feet high in this place, by means of the vines, and thus escape. I started to test them, when they broke and I fell inward, not against the face of the rock, as I supposed, but into this strange hole. I only had time to rearrange the entrance properly when you came in sight. I have had no opportunity to explore the interior."

He thereupon held the vines widely apart so as to admit as much light as possible, while the other two proceeded to investigate carefully the extent of the cave. They found that it ran back a distance of some twenty feet, with an average width of about ten, while its height in its lowest portion, the entrance, was fully six feet. The height gradually increased toward the middle, until finally a small opening was discovered in the roof that showed the daylight faintly through. Evidently some hidden stream in the olden time had burrowed its way through the limestone rock, eventually increasing the interior to its present dimensions.



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The three boys sat down near the entrance and gazed at one another in mute surprise and delight. At last François broke the silence:

“What a fine place it would be in which to camp. We could have a fire at night, the smoke would go up through the hole in the roof, while these vines would prevent the light from being seen from the river.”

“Say rather a refuge from the Indians in case of need. With a store of provisions here we could stay as long as we wished, without running any risk of discovery. One of us could steal down at night to the river for a supply of water,” suggested Pierre.

“What a pity we are not robbers or pirates,” exclaimed Jean excitedly. “We could store all of our gold and other plunder here, and hold midnight meetings to discuss our plans.”

“Nonsense!” was Pierre’s reproving reply. “There are no pirates about here. Besides, we are not thieves, but honest men. But it would indeed be the place for secret meetings.”

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Jean was thoughtful, not noticing the tone of his brother's speech. At length his eyes flashed with excitement. "I have it, the very thing," and he lay back upon the floor of the cave, chuckling with delight.

"If you have anything worth saying, say it, instead of rolling around in the dirt," was Pierre's impatient answer.

"Listen then," replied Jean, sitting up again and talking eagerly. "You know when men have a great regard for each other or a deep purpose in life to carry out they always form themselves into a secret brotherhood. For example, I have read that when the nobles conspire to dethrone a king they always form a secret alliance, binding themselves together with a terrible oath for the purpose of carrying out their object. They also have mysterious signs and words of communication, and strange lonely places of assembling in the late hours of the night. Or take the priests, do they not form brotherhoods, take solemn vows, meet secretly to conduct their affairs—all that their noble aims may be the better

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carried out? Why cannot we form a brotherhood of three?"

"But there is no king to be deposed—we love our King too well for that. Besides, I for one do not want to become a monk," objected Pierre dubiously.

"True," replied Jean persistently, "but are we not very fond of François, here? Suppose some enemy of his should arise and try to do him harm, would we not want to help him in every way we could? And would he not in turn aid us? If we three should form an alliance for mutual protection we could thus defend each other."

"And we could have this cave as our secret meeting place," added Pierre, beginning to be interested.

"Ever since our friend the trader told us of his military expedition against the English I have been thinking how we boys could fight for the Colony and the King. It would be too long to wait until we were old enough to enter the army. Besides, from something my uncle said recently, there are rumors that the English are liable to

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attack Quebec. If they did, might we not be able to render good service as scouts? If they came by water, as they probably would, we could spy out their movements from this place, and perhaps gain important information to carry to the Governor."

"Good!" cried François, speaking for the first time. "We could undoubtedly accomplish something that the soldiers themselves shut up in the city could never do. For my part I am willing."

"What would we have as our secret?" queried Pierre. "For a brotherhood without a secret would be no brotherhood at all."

"Let the existence of this cave, the location of which is known only to us three, be our secret," suggested François.

"But would it be right to have any secrets from our uncle?" asked Jean doubtfully.

"Pshaw!" replied Pierre. "How can our discovery of this cave hurt him? He would not care. It would spoil our fun not to have some sort of secret."

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“Very well,” said Jean, convinced. “But what shall we do for signs and passwords?”

“We do not need any signs or passwords,” answered François. “But we can have a system of signals. If I wanted to communicate with you I would stand under your window and hoot like an owl. For example, if I wanted to tell you to come out I would give three long hoots for the letter ‘C,’ because that is the third letter of the alphabet. ‘O,’ is the fifteenth, and would be represented by one long hoot and five short ones. ‘M,’ by one long and three short, ‘E,’ by five long cries.”

“Splendid!” cried Pierre, thoroughly aroused, “And if you were in the next room you could tap on the wall.”

“*Certainement!*” responded François; “a little practice will make us quite expert.”

“How could we arrange for our night meetings? We could not leave and enter the house without some one discovering us; Bolo, for example, who would surely tell my uncle.”

“I will make you a rope ladder which you can

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easily hide in your room. When you want to go out all you will have to do will be to attach it to a piece of heavy furniture like your bed, and drop the other end to the ground from your window. Then when you return, it can be pulled in after you."

This idea was received with applause by the other two.

"What kind of an oath shall we take?" was Pierre's next question.

"I will tell you," cried Jean after a moment's thought. "All three stand up and clasp hands." This was done. "Now do you repeat after me: I solemnly promise——"

"I solemnly promise," replied his companions.

"To be loyal and true to all the members of this our brotherhood."

"—this our brotherhood," echoed the two older boys.

"And I hereby agree to aid, defend, and love them, at all times and under all circumstances, to the best of my ability, until released from my promise by their unanimous consent. Their loss

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shall be my loss, their secrets my secrets, their peril my peril. All this I promise on my honor as a gentleman."

Thus was the solemn obligation assumed by the three boys with a gravity beyond their years. Within the cave all was silent. Without, the river flowed by noiselessly, the clinging vine at the entrance swayed in the soft breeze with an almost imperceptible rustle, while the afternoon sun, pouring its warm rays between the leaves, fell upon their earnest faces, already lighted up by the glow of youth and fine feelings. Thus did the day ebb slowly to its close, but all unknown and unseen there dawned a new epoch in the lives of these youths, fraught with heavy responsibility and grave peril.

## CHAPTER VII

CONTAINS SOME MYSTERIOUS EVENTS THAT BODE  
ILL FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE BROTHERHOOD

THE following week was spent in fitting up the cave so as to render it habitable. François declared he would enjoy spending many of his nights there in preference to going home. The floor was carefully swept clear of the dried leaves that had collected, while in the center a pile of flat stones was erected on which a fire could be built. From Jacques Ormesson the boys received a goodly supply of powder and bullets without telling him the purpose for which they wished to use them. François brought a number of skins, dilapidated and worn to be sure, but still serviceable, which were used as rugs on which to sit or lie. A quantity of rope was obtained out of which he constructed a ladder. The remainder was coiled up in a corner and preserved against the time when it might prove very



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useful. The bluff was scaled in order to determine what sort of outlet it was through which the smoke of their fire would pass when it was built. It was discovered that a large cone-shaped rock about ten feet high rested immediately over the cave. This rock had been split by some strange agency of nature, and it was through the wide crevice in its side some five feet from the base thus made that the daylight was visible from below. François expressed considerable surprise at this discovery.

“Strange indeed!” he said to his companions. “This rock is known far and wide as ‘Chimney Rock’ from its shape, and is used as a landmark for ships coming up the channel of the river. Little will the navigators think that we are using it as a real chimney for our fire.”

In the mean time, the hunting and tramps through the woods were not neglected. These latter gave the two boys an excellent opportunity to observe and mimic the cries of various birds, and in a short time they became quite proficient. When separated they would practice exchanging

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signals, until they could both send and receive short messages with ease. They met regularly two nights a week in the cave at midnight ; Pierre and Jean slipping out and returning by means of their rope ladder without fear of detection. At these meetings a huge fire of driftwood was built on the pile of flat stones which lighted up every corner and diffused a comfortable warmth throughout the cavern, dispelling the chill which in this northern latitude was felt even in summer as soon as the sun went down. On these occasions the three boys, stretched at full length upon the skins about the fire, discussed their own future plans and hopes with enthusiasm, together with those of the Colony, for the English invasion was an assured fact. Reliable information had been brought to Quebec that the English had already set sail from Boston, and might ere long ascend the St. Lawrence in their bold attempt to subdue the mighty stronghold that stood as the bulwark of all New France.

Governor Frontenac, fearing some such action on the part of the enemy as a result of the three

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war parties he had dispatched against them the previous winter, had given much attention to the strengthening of the weak points in the fortifications of the city. The last of July he had gone up the river to Montreal to take part in the annual meeting there of the friendly Indians from the Great Lakes, the Hurons and Ottawas, assembled with their cargoes of furs to trade with the French. In his absence a multitude of rumors filled the air, many of which the boys heard and which served to increase their excitement. Among these rumors was one to the effect that the hated savage allies of the English, the Iroquois, were about to make a land attack from the west, to coincide with the expected bombardment from the English fleet.

One night Jean, whose mind had probably been dwelling upon this new danger, experienced a terrible dream. He had been pursued by a band of painted savages who gained steadily on him until he was surrounded and about to be captured when he awoke with a start, all atremble with excitement. Sitting up in bed he looked

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about him wildly for a moment, until he recognized by the light of the moon his familiar surroundings. Settling down he attempted to go to sleep again, but his nervous condition prevented his doing so. His thoughts were busy along the line suggested by his dream—namely, Indians. Suddenly his attention was arrested by the soft tread as of moccasined feet in the hall outside his door. The hour was late, the house was perfectly still, so that the slightest noise was distinctly audible. The sound continued. Leaping from bed he quietly opened the door and glided into the hall. He proceeded but a few feet when he beheld the figure of an Indian wrapped in a blanket, standing full in the moonlight before the door of his uncle's room. Motionless it stood, but every feature of the savage face was plainly visible in the bright glare.

The boy uttered a piercing cry that reëchoed through the lonely hall. Instantly the Indian vanished. A moment later the door of Captain Bordeleau's room opened, and he appeared in the doorway fully dressed and with a lighted candle

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in his hand. As soon as he perceived Jean's trembling form, he frowned.

"*Ventrebleu!*" he said in an irritated tone, "what mean you by such a noise? One would think you were being murdered."

"The Indian! The Indian!" cried Jean, pointing toward the shadows of the farther end of the hall in the direction in which the figure had vanished.

"Indian? What Indian?" queried Captain Bordeleau anxiously.

Jean then related his experience. His uncle looked much provoked. "*Peste!*" he exclaimed roughly, "there are no Indians about this house. Be about your business. Go back to bed and sleep. It is late." Then, as though desirous of convincing the lad, he beckoned to him. Together they advanced toward the darkened end of the hall. "See," he continued as he held the candle aloft, "there is no one here. You must have been dreaming of the redskins, were you not?"

"Yes, monsieur."

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“ Ah, that explains it ! ” he said with an air of relief. “ You were under the influence of your dream, when, through some impulse, you got up and entered the hall, and thought you saw a live savage. Back now to your room or you will get cold. You have interrupted me in my work, which keeps me up late to-night.”

Jean returned, but not to sleep. He crept in beside Pierre, who was slumbering through it all, and lay down to troubled thoughts. That he had been wide awake when he heard the soft footfalls he was certain. No one could convince him that he had not seen a veritable Indian in the moonlight. What was the intruder doing in the house? Why was his uncle up and dressed so late at night? Why had he seemed angry when he told him what he had seen? Why had he tried to explain it away as a mere illusion?

These and similar thoughts filled his mind until finally, just at daybreak, he sank into a light slumber. When he awakened he told the whole story to Pierre, who was unable to fathom the mystery, for mystery it undoubtedly was.

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At breakfast Captain Bordeleau greeted them affably. "And how is my dreamer of dreams and seer of visions this morning?" he remarked playfully to Jean as he took his seat. "I fear your supper was too rich for you to sleep restfully. I must speak to Bolo about it so that he may give us simpler fare."

Later in the day the two boys called at the trader's shop, and when they were able to get him alone told him of the strange adventure of the night before, omitting no detail. Ormesson listened gravely until they had finished, then leaned back in meditative silence for some moments. At length he looked at his two companions with a sympathetic eye.

"You did well," he began, "to come to me at once in your perplexity. Troublous times are upon us, and it is fitting that you should know what I have wished to tell you long ago. Ugly rumors have been plentiful concerning your uncle for some years. He has managed in some way to quiet them until lately, when they have been more numerous than ever. Were it not that

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more weighty matters have engaged the mind of the Governor recently, I doubt not but that some of your uncle's affairs would have been closely examined, resulting, I firmly believe, in consequences disastrous to him. What my own interpretation of last night's proceeding is, I shall not now tell you. You are, however, in no personal danger from him. Only be careful lest he call upon you to perform some act, apparently harmless, that might prove to be serious in its consequences to you. Avoid his society as much as possible, and if anything further occurs remember I am your friend, as much so as though you were my own flesh and blood; come and advise freely with me."

Pierre and Jean left the trader thankful for his warm interest in them, but with an added feeling of alarm because of the dangers vaguely hinted at. They resolved, however, to follow his advice carefully. In addition they determined not to report their friend's fears to François, but only to relate their recent adventure and allow him to draw his own conclusions.



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Affairs with their uncle grew worse instead of better. His attitude changed from apparent frankness to one of doubt and suspicion. If he chanced to peruse a letter or document of any sort at the table, he was continually glancing up sharply to see that they were not endeavoring to read its contents. In the daytime he seemed uneasy while they were in the house. At night he was restless until they had retired. On several occasions Jean awakened and heard the same silent tread in the hall, or the low, muffled hum of human voices engaged in secret conversation. Twice did a mysterious stranger arrive, his face closely muffled, and remain closeted with Captain Bordeleau until the night was far spent.

Living in this atmosphere of suspicion and dread of an unseen danger soon told upon the two boys. At night they tossed restlessly in their sleep or awakened panic-stricken by some strange dream. Even their interest in the affairs of the brotherhood waned under this load of constant anxiety. Matters went on in this

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fashion day after day until they were terminated in a singular manner.

One night they were suddenly awakened by a knock on their door. Before either could speak it was opened and Captain Bordeleau entered bearing a candle. By its light they saw that he was laboring under some unusual excitement.

“Get up,” he said hurriedly, “and put on your clothes.”

While they obeyed he went on: “I wish you to do me an important service. I am unexpectedly summoned to see the Intendant. There is no one in the house; the servants are asleep.” Then pointing out of the window: “I am expecting a signal from some friends at any moment. I want you to stand here and watch carefully. When you see a light flash, then disappear and flash again, you are to hold this candle in the window, then lower it to the floor, and hold it up a second time. Be careful to count the answering signal. It will consist of one flash or three. Remember which it is and report to me in the morning.”

He placed the candle on the table and started

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to withdraw. Pierre suddenly recollected the warning of the trader not to become involved in any of his uncle's irregularities.

"Pardon me, monsieur," he said in a respectful tone, "but what does all this signaling mean? We can do nothing blindly. It would be wrong for us to do anything of that sort unless we knew the reason for it."

Captain Bordeleau turned upon him in a fury. "Ten thousand devils!" he cried. "Do you refuse me the first request for aid I have made? You, beggar that you are, living on my charity? Wrong! You must know, forsooth, what it all means!" and he stopped speaking through sheer inability to express his feelings.

"That we are beholden to you for much, monsieur, we freely admit," replied Pierre firmly. "We owe you any service that we can honorably render. But we owe a higher service to our King and country. Our enemies are soon to attack Quebec, it is said, and we are willing to aid in any way possible against them, boys though we are. If the service you require of us be entirely a

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worthy one, why make a mystery of it? The signals might convey important information to our friends. They might also disclose something of value to the enemy. The English——”

At the word Pierre saw his uncle's face pale suddenly, despite its angry flush. Then it flamed redder than before, while a black malignant look spread over his features. Before he could reply his eye caught sight of the flashing of a distant light. The tiny spark disappeared, then glowed another instant in the darkness and went out.

Captain Bordeleau quickly caught up the candle to make the answering signal. Pierre, who was standing near and had seen all that happened, by a quick movement of his hand struck the light to the floor, thus extinguishing it. His uncle stumbled toward the door uttering a volley of curses, and rushed to his own room for another candle. The boys heard him run up a flight of stairs to the room directly above their own. Then, after he had spent a moment in signaling from the upper window, the answering light

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flashed three times. A little later he hurried down, passed their door without stopping, and went out into the night, slamming the street door behind him.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PLOT THICKENS, AND PERPLEXITIES ARE MET WHICH END IN A SURPRISE

THE boys slept little during the night. Their situation was indeed alarming, for Pierre by one impulsive act had turned their uncle from a well-wisher into a foe. He shuddered as he remembered the words of Jacques Ormesson: "It is much wiser to have him for a friend than an enemy." They were utterly dependent upon his favor, which would undoubtedly now be withdrawn. But in addition with his resentment raised against them, what harm might he not do to them! Pierre's estimate of his uncle's character was none of the highest. That he was a man who, in public and concerning affairs where his own interest might be involved, would act with scrupulous courtesy and honor he well believed. But where his will was thwarted or his plans of gain were placed in jeopardy, he felt that Cap-

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tain Bordeleau would give his natural bent for cunning intrigue full sway.

Pierre's conscience, however, was clear concerning his own part in the night's adventure. The fact of his uncle's unwillingness to offer some assurance regarding the meaning of the mysterious signals, made it evident that the business in which he was engaged was of a nefarious nature. The boy's primitive sense of right and wrong was strong. Had it not been involved, he would never have acted as he had done, or if so, he would have gladly offered whatever apology was necessary. As it was, it never occurred to him that he himself was to blame in any way, and he felt assured that if the thing were to be done over again, the result would be the same.

In a couple of hours they heard their uncle return, and the sounds of human voices that reached their ear betrayed the fact that he was not alone. Shortly before dawn the voices ceased and the boys recognized the same stealthy tread passing down the hall that had previously terrified Jean.

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They were in the midst of dressing when a knock was heard and Bolo entered bearing their breakfast, together with an order from Captain Bordeleau to the effect that they should not leave their room until he gave them permission. Jean looked at his brother in dismay. Evidently war between themselves and their uncle was declared. Believing that he would only be still further incensed against them if they disobeyed, they remained all day in their room, amusing themselves as best they could through the long hours, the monotony being broken by the arrival of Bolo at meal times. Pierre forbore questioning him, knowing that he was attached heart and soul to his master's interests.

Bedtime arrived and still no further message came. At last when eleven o'clock had struck and the house was still, the two boys, who had finally decided upon a plan, took their guns and, after bolting the door, quietly departed by means of the rope ladder. The night was cloudy with occasional glimpses of clear sky in which the half-moon rode like a silver boat, dipping and



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plunging among the fleecy waves that overwhelmed her completely, only to appear again later victorious. When they touched the ground, they quietly scurried off, bent on reaching the cave as soon as possible, for they knew that François would be awaiting their arrival, anxious to learn the cause of their absence during the day. Had they stopped to look about carefully when they descended, they would have seen by the light of the newly emerged moon the dark figure of Bolo crouched behind a corner of the house watching their movements intently. Had not their hearts beat so loudly with excitement as they hurried to their meeting place, they might have heard the sound of his light footfall as he followed them a short distance behind. When they reached their destination the dark face of the negro peered an instant through the vine curtain at the mouth of the cave. Having seen all he wished, he silently glided homeward, after marking the spot carefully.

The two brothers found the faithful François reclining before the fire as they had expected.

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He glanced inquiringly at the guns in their hands.

"We have met with a real adventure," Pierre explained, "that may necessitate our making this hiding place our home at a moment's notice. Hence we thought it best to prepare in time for sudden flight."

He thereupon related in full the events of the night before, a proceeding that made François open his eyes to an alarming extent. When his companion finished his recital he asked simply, "What can I do?"

"You?" queried Jean.

"Yes, does not that which affects one member of our brotherhood affect all? Is not your loss my loss, and your peril my peril, according to our mutual agreement?"

Pierre and Jean sprang up impulsively and seized his hands. "You give us courage," cried the former. "We did not want to involve you in our troubles, and had determined to release you from your promise," exclaimed Jean.

A grieved look came over François's face at

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these words. "And do you think my promises are made only to be withdrawn at the first moment of testing? You would not have wished to be released from your pledge had I been the one in danger."

"No, no!" cried the other two.

"Then why should you suppose that I would desire to seek cover at the first sign of peril?"

Pierre flushed at this reproach. "Forgive us, François, but we meant no harm. It was only your safety we had in mind. We did not wish to bring upon you our uncle's displeasure."

François smiled, somewhat mollified. "I understand. It was your own unselfish regard for me that prompted the thought. But never fear. Your uncle's enmity will cause me no alarm. This is a free land; also a large one. I venture to say I could find some corner in it where I would be beyond the reach of his anger."

Good feeling being thus restored, they discussed at full length their precarious situation. If Captain Bordeleau's resentment abated, then there would be no need of further anxiety. If

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not, then they could speedily retire to this hiding place and remain for a time until the sky cleared. With guns and plenty of ammunition they could procure abundance of food, while a canoe and some fishing lines, which François agreed to bring the next day, would enable them to travel whither they would and provide them with additional means of sustenance.

Finally, they broke up their meeting, agreeing to assemble again on the following night. Pierre and Jean reached their room in safety.

In the morning Bolo brought their breakfast as before, and with it a message from Captain Bordeleau requesting their presence in a half-hour in his library.

At the time appointed the two boys descended to the lower floor, not without some feelings of trepidation and dread of the approaching interview. Would he storm angrily at them for their ingratitude and disobedience, telling them to be-gone, that he would henceforth wash his hands of them and their affairs? Or, worse still, would he turn Pierre adrift and force Jean to stay with

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him, thus separating them? They had resolved that if the latter were the case they would steal away that night never to return, trusting to a kind Providence and the worthy trader to aid in removing them far from the power and influence of their uncle.

Neither of these fears was realized, but a greater surprise awaited them. When they entered the room and stood near the door in some embarrassment, they were greeted with courtesy and cordiality by Captain Bordeleau, who requested them to be seated. Then with an encouraging smile he began to address them, looking with kindly eyes at Pierre:

“You doubtless felt that I had summoned you to upbraid you for your refusal to accede to my request two nights ago. You are mistaken. Perhaps my words to you at the time were hasty and ill advised. If so, I ask your pardon. When one labors under great excitement, events which ordinarily would not ruffle him often cause transient anger. You are, however, too young not to have some discipline in your lives; hence my command

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that you should keep your room until further notice, a command," he continued with an especially engaging smile, "which I was pleased to see that you carefully obeyed, for I have not heard you descend once, and my servants have not seen you anywhere about the house while I have been absent."

Jean blushed and looked down, feeling very uncomfortable under this praise. When his uncle paused he opened his lips impulsively to speak, but Pierre, who noticed his action and whose hand rested upon his shoulder, gave it an admonitory pressure that checked him. Captain Borda-leau continued:

"That discipline having been endured, you are free now to do as you will. I would, however, make a request—mind you, not a command—that you do not leave the house to-day or to-morrow. You will have plenty to do, however, for I desire that you should make all necessary preparations for a rather long journey. You have had time to learn all that your companion, whom I engaged, can teach you. I have therefore made arrange-

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ments for you to enter a broader field. It happens that one of my Indian trappers, who acts as agent for me in collecting furs among the Hurons, is in Quebec and returns to the Huron country day after to-morrow, and it is my wish that you both return with him. You will be gone a month and will have every advantage under his care of learning much concerning the friendly tribes, their customs and manner of trading, together with the life that such people lead. The Indian to whom I intrust you is thoroughly reliable, and will be answerable to me for your comfort and safety. He speaks very good French, and is a man of great influence among his own people. You will thoroughly enjoy as well as profit by the experience."

The minds of the boys were filled with dismay. This matter of being sent into the wilderness among savages with only one of them as their friend and ally, was more than they had bargained for. Pierre started to speak, but his uncle interrupted him:

"Not a word, *mon cher ami*, not one word of

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thanks. I know you appreciate fully the effort I am making in your behalf, and am content," and with a wave of dismissal toward the door he turned to his desk, and picking up a paper became immediately engaged in its attentive perusal. Neither of the youths felt like interrupting him, so they quietly withdrew to their own room. When their door was closed they gave vent to their disapproval. Jean strove manfully to choke back the sobs that would rise despite his best endeavors.

"O Pierre! what shall we do?" he exclaimed. "We surely do not want to go so far away from all white people with no one but savages about us."

"Never mind, Jean," replied Pierre reassuringly. "We do not want to go and we shall not."

This firm determination was brought about in Pierre's mind by his fancied detection of the same lurking menace in his uncle's eyes, for all his fair speaking, that he had seen at the time of their first interview. This, together with the



## THE PLOT THICKENS

natural distrust of his uncle's integrity occasioned by the affair of the strange signals, had awakened the spirit of rebellion within him. He determined to go at once to Captain Bordeleau and explain their dread of such an expedition, and attempt to persuade him to alter his plan to an extended hunting trip under Francois's care, which would undoubtedly be of much benefit to them. Before he could put this resolve into effect he heard the front door close, and going to a window at the front of the house he saw his uncle hurrying down the street. This necessitated a postponement of the contemplated interview.

At dinner the boys were alone. The afternoon was spent awaiting Captain Bordeleau's return. Supper was eaten, and still he had not come back. Finally, at about ten o'clock the two boys descended their ladder and stole in a circuitous track to the house of Jacques Ormesson. They felt that they needed his advice in the present crisis. They found him just closing up for the night, but he welcomed them heartily and sat

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down with them to learn if they had any news to communicate.

Pierre began with the relation of the scene in their room over the signal question. As he proceeded, Ormesson's eyes opened with interest, although his brow darkened. When Pierre described his refusal to become a party to the affair without knowing something of its purpose, he chuckled with approval, but when he learned of Pierre's attempt at preventing his uncle from flashing back an answering light, he burst into a shout of commendation. "Bravo!" he cried, "that is the sort of spirit that I like." The imprisonment in their room and the interview of that morning were next related. Ormesson's face denoted genuine alarm. "Never!" he exclaimed. "It was on just such a trip as that that he sent your father to his death. You must not go."

He approved heartily of Pierre's plan to endeavor to alter his uncle's purpose, but without much faith in its success.

"If he still persists," he continued, "there is

## THE PLOT THICKENS

but one thing to do; seek refuge in the hiding place you have told me about." Then relapsing into a meditative silence he began to frown more deeply. "No," he finally said, "that would accomplish nothing and it might be dangerous to delay. I feel assured he has some scheme on foot for your harm. Escape to-night while you can to your cave. Let François keep in touch with me occasionally, and I shall endeavor to plan out your future actions. I would insist on your coming here, but you would run a risk through my assistant, who, although a worthy fellow, might possibly let something slip that would be disastrous."

After leaving their friend the boys decided to return home and get their hunting clothes and a few other little things. On arriving there they found the house dark and silent. They made their way up the ladder and entered their room. Nothing had been disturbed during their absence. Quickly gathering together what they wished, they took their departure, waving farewell to the house that after all was the only home

### COMRADES THREE

they had in spite of the unpleasant occurrences that had happened within its walls.

They reached the cave and found François a trifle uneasy at their delay. When told about their uncle's proposed trip for them, his eyes flashed ominously. When he learned that they had really left him, and were come to take up their residence in the cave, he waxed enthusiastic as the spirit of adventure rose within him.

They carefully placed the things which they had brought with them alongside their guns in the farther end of the cave, exchanged the clothes they wore for their hunting attire, and then stretched themselves lazily before the fire to rest and talk over future plans. They were deeply engrossed in this occupation when a slight sound from the direction of the entrance caused them to glance up. Imagine their surprise on beholding the forms of three Indians standing near, each with his rifle pointed straight at them.



“Three Indians . . . each with his rifle pointed straight at them.”



## CHAPTER IX

### DESCRIBES A LONG JOURNEY AND MUCH DISCOURAGEMENT

THE three boys looked in consternation at the threatening gun muzzles that covered them, then at one another, without venturing to stir. They all instinctively appreciated the uselessness of resistance. Their own weapons were stacked in a far corner of the cave, entirely out of reach. Their assailants, besides being armed, were all full-grown men against whose strength they were no match.

A moment of motionless silence followed. Then a fourth savage, who had remained concealed behind the others, stalked forth into the light, holding several short pieces of rope, with which he proceeded to bind the hands and feet of the boys together, rendering them entirely helpless. He then carefully gagged each so that

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it would be impossible for him to cry out. When this was accomplished the guns were lowered and the captors squatted together near the fire to warm themselves, conversing in low guttural tones.

Jean, as he lay watching the firelight playing upon their faces, gave a start of surprise when he viewed that of the leader, for in him he recognized the mysterious visitor at his uncle's house whose presence had so terrified him. This discovery greatly increased his alarm. His first thought was that they had been seen and followed to their rendezvous by the Indians with the idea of capturing them and holding them for ransom or to exchange them for some of their own tribe, perhaps, that were then in the hands of the French. But if, as it appeared, Captain Bordeleau had a hand in the affair, it boded worse for them.

He was interrupted in his train of thought by a spirited argument that arose among the Indians. From the glances cast at the prostrate François it was evident that he was the subject of their con-



## A LONG JOURNEY

versation. The leader seemed to be trying to convince his confederates of the necessity of taking him with them instead of leaving him behind, as they apparently wished to do. At last the debate ended by their acquiescing in their chief's view, for they rose and lifting François between them carried him out of the cave. A moment or two later they returned and removed Pierre. Finally, Jean, too, was taken.

By the light of the moon two canoes were visible drawn up on the shore. François was placed in the bottom of one of them, while the two brothers were laid in the other. Two Indians then entered each canoe, pushed off, and soon they were silently gliding over the surface of the river. A diagonal course was taken at first until the opposite shore was near, when the prows were pointed directly upstream. The few lights still burning in Quebec were soon passed, but their speed was not slackened. On with tireless paddle stroke they dashed, the only sound audible to the recumbent captives being the gurgling of the waters beneath them.

### COMRADES THREE

Several hours went by. Finally, when the first gray of dawn came a landing was made. The boys, stiff and cold, were lifted out, the canoes were hidden behind some bushes near the water's edge, and the whole party withdrew into the woods. Here a tiny fire was made, over which they shivered for a while. The gags were removed from the boys' mouths and food and water were given them. Being thus refreshed, a few pine boughs were heaped together; they were then placed thereon and bidden to sleep. The Indians likewise stretched themselves out wearily and soon were deep in slumber. All danger of noise being gone, the gags had not been replaced. This was some alleviation to their misery, although they suffered considerably from the chafing of their bonds. When the deep breathing of the savages had persisted regularly for an hour, the captives deemed it safe to converse with one another in low whispers. They discussed their situation thoroughly and endeavored to cheer one another up. François, although well acquainted with the Indian tongue, had been unable to over-

## A LONG JOURNEY

hear any conversation among the savages, hence was unenlightened from that source. Jean reported his discovery as to the identity of the leader of the band. This news so effectually dampened the spirits of the three that after a few desultory attempts at mutual encouragement they gave up and soon were sleeping with the rest.

When they awakened they found it was late afternoon. One of the Indians was cooking at the fire a couple of birds and a rabbit, which he had knocked over with well-aimed blows of his hatchet. The boys were hungry and partook readily of the food offered them. This, together with some brandy which the leader poured out for them from a receptacle which he jealously guarded, strengthened them to endure the fatigue of their journey.

In this fashion did they proceed, traveling by night and resting in hidden security by day. When the chief settlements, such as Three Rivers or Montreal, were reached, the gags were replaced lest a warning cry should bring pursuit.

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At length upon their right appeared the entrance of a smaller stream, the Ottawa, into which they turned. At their next camping place not only were the gags removed, but the ropes which bound the captives so cruelly were taken off. Evidently all danger of capture or escape of the prisoners was at an end. One of the savages rubbed their wrists and ankles until the circulation was entirely restored and the stiffness gone. Henceforward they could kneel in the canoes like the Indians, and see something of the country through which they were going. Traveling was now done in the daytime and their rest taken at night. They were treated kindly by their captors, who allowed them considerable liberty, although they always kept a close watch of their movements. The bright, clear air, the changing scene, the occasional use of the paddle, the tramp through the woods at the portage, the glad relaxation of tired limbs as they reclined upon the springy boughs at night—all would have been delightful had not the haunting thought that they were prisoners being conveyed

## A LONG JOURNEY

toward a mysterious fate disturbed their minds.

The only precaution to insure against their escape was taken at night, when each boy's wrists were fastened securely by a short rope to the arm of one of his captors. The discipline among the Indians themselves was also relaxed. A more leisurely course was pursued. They shot abundant game without fear of the sound of their firearms. At night about the camp fire they partook freely of their stock of brandy.

One night it chanced that more of this was taken than usual, until the redskins became somewhat stupid and surly. Their demeanor toward the boys changed, and an attitude of insolent authority was assumed. They were ordered to replenish the fire, to prepare the boughs for their couches, and do other menial tasks. They obeyed willingly, fearing to provoke their enemies while under the influence of the potent liquor. Finally, François was commanded by the leader to step to the canoes, which were stranded on the shore a hundred yards away, and fetch some tobacco

### COMRADES THREE

which he would find in one of them. He disappeared on his errand. Upon his not returning in a few minutes the leader grew angry at the delay and sent one of the Indians after him. Presently a shout of alarm was heard and the savage returned in great excitement. Motioning to the captives to precede them, each of the redskins lighted a pine stick and running to the shore they discovered that the alarm of their comrade was well founded, for the smaller canoe, containing a portion of their provisions, a gun, and some ammunition, had disappeared. François had escaped! Two of them sprang to the larger canoe to shove off in hot pursuit when a cry of rage from one of their number revealed the fact that before leaving François had taken pains to stave a huge hole in its bottom that rendered it useless. What was worse, it was beyond repair. A simultaneous yell of anger from the throats of their captors made Pierre and Jean tremble for their own safety.

The entire party returned to the camp fire. The leader superintended the tying of the wrists

## A LONG JOURNEY

and ankles of the brothers, and appointed one of his men to stand on guard until relieved a few hours later by a second, thus dividing the sleeping time into three equal periods, he himself choosing to sleep all night. Pierre and Jean lay a long time in deep dejection. The sentry stationed near them remained wide awake so that they could not talk to one another, and they were thus left alone with their own thoughts, which were discouraging enough. As long as François was with them they had felt a sense of security, and a vague hope that somehow with his assistance they might effect their escape, but now that he was gone they realized more fully their utter helplessness. That he had seized this opportunity of getting away for any selfish end they did not for a moment believe. They knew he would use his best endeavors to bring them assistance. But even if he were able to make the journey back to Montreal without interruption, it would be several weeks before he could return with a force sufficient to compel the Indians to release their prisoners. He had discovered that their

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captors were members of an Algonquin tribe whose remnants still roamed the regions of the Upper Ottawa. But they were a migratory people who stayed but a short time in any one place. Hence it would be extremely difficult for him to discover them on his return. Even if this feat were possible, so long a time would necessarily elapse that any one of several horrible fates might easily be theirs. Their sudden surprise and treatment as prisoners told them too plainly that their uncle's description of a peaceable hunting trip was false. Thus tormented by foreboding thoughts, and disturbed by fearful dreams, they tossed the long night through, awaking often only to find the eye of the wary sentinel fixed upon them.

The loss of their canoes necessitated important changes in the plans of the savages. Abandoning the river they made ready to continue their journey by land. The contents of the large canoe were accordingly distributed among them all, the boys being compelled to carry their share. A start was then made, the party proceeding in



## A LONG JOURNEY

single file, two of the Indians leading, closely followed by the prisoners, while the remaining savages brought up the rear.

Their progress was inevitably slow, as it was necessary to accommodate the pace of all to the strength of the brothers. At nightfall they were entirely worn out, their feet were swollen, hot, and tender, while their shoulders ached from carrying the heavy load. They flung themselves down in utter exhaustion, until they were roused by one of the savages who brought them some food. After this was eaten they fell into a heavy sleep.

The next morning their condition was but little improved. Nevertheless they were obliged to start despite their blisters and stiffened ankles. Frequent stops were made during the day, as it became apparent that the boys would soon be absolutely unable to stand unless great care was exercised. Thus did they proceed through the forest, fording tiny streams, plowing through bits of swampland, painfully toiling up an occasional steep ascent.

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Gradually the boys became hardened to the work, and they were able to increase their rate of speed.

Finally, from a few words of encouragement spoken to them by the leader, they knew that their journey was near its end. The next day a hunting party of six was met with, who greeted the newcomers cordially and eyed the prisoners with considerable curiosity, followed by looks of satisfaction when an explanation was offered them in a low tone by the leader, a circumstance that seemed certainly ominous to the unhappy boys.

Toward evening the distant yelping of dogs was heard, followed later by the cries of children. The woods thinned out considerably until they disappeared entirely in an open place some five acres in extent, on which was erected an Indian village, consisting of some thirty rude bark huts. When their arrival was perceived, a succession of shouts arose and soon they were surrounded by a crowd of excited savages—warriors, squaws, and children—all of whom attempted to talk at once. When the confusion had subsided a little,

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the boys were taken to one of the huts. Here they were securely tied hand and foot and left to themselves, either to sleep or listen to the strange sounds arising on all sides, sounds common enough in any Indian village, but which to their unaccustomed ears were fraught with forebodings of disaster.

## CHAPTER X

IN WHICH THE COURAGE OF THE CAPTIVES IS  
SEVERELY TESTED

THERE came a time at length when the commotion about them subsided and silence reigned as the inhabitants of the village sought their rest. Pierre and Jean, however, found it impossible to sleep. Their strange surroundings coupled with the thoughts of their perilous situation kept them wide awake. After talking for some time Pierre determined to explore their prison. Bound hand and foot as he was he was unable to walk, so he attempted to move about by rolling his body over and over the smooth dirt floor. By this slow means he made his way toward the entrance, which was closed by a huge bearskin. This, however, did not fit the aperture completely, but left several openings close to the ground through which he was able to peep. Peering cautiously

## COURAGE TESTED

out he beheld a fire burning a short distance in front of the hut, before which a solitary Indian sat smoking, evidently a guard stationed to prevent their possible escape. As Pierre watched him he yawned several times, stretched vigorously as though very tired, then got up, replenished the fire, and lay down. The light of the flames as they shot up disclosed another hut close to that in which they were confined. These two huts seemed to be separated a little from the rest of the village. Close behind them yawned the blackness of the forest. Pierre by careful observation was able to determine something of the outside structure of his prison. The walls seemed to consist of a framework of poles planted in the ground, the intervening spaces being covered with bark. How easy it would be to cut their way out if their hands were but free and his keen hunting knife were only with them! He very sensibly did not waste any time in idle wishing, but after another glance around returned to Jean and explained the results of his investigations.

Suddenly, while thus engaged, a sound arose

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that chilled them both to the bone. It was a human voice raised in a prolonged feeble wail. Again its weird note sounded, then died away. Judging from the direction of the cry Pierre was convinced that it came from the neighboring hut which he had seen.

“How horrible!” whispered Jean, his teeth chattering with terror.

“Yes,” replied Pierre, no less disturbed, for it brought the thought of some unfortunate in great pain, a prisoner like themselves, perhaps, who had undergone some savage torture. “But listen! perhaps it will sound again.”

The two boys waited breathless, but the cry was not repeated. Instead they heard a low muttering. Now and then a few French words were intelligible, but no sense could be made from them. Both the brothers uttered a smothered exclamation, for they recognized the voice as that of a white man!

Jean, whose tender heart was touched, began to cry softly to himself. The hardships he had undergone recently, together with his anxiety,

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had been too much of a nervous strain for him. This cry of suffering from French lips appealed strongly to his sympathies. Pierre, too, was greatly moved.

“ Fiends and cowards ! ” he muttered, writhing impotently as he strove to free himself from his bonds, “ who torture one poor, helpless fellow who happens to be in their power. A single Frenchman is worth a tribe of these red devils ! ”

The muttering sound ceased, and no further noise was heard from that direction. The boys were thus left alone to their own thoughts, which were despondent to a high degree. Silence still reigned about them. Only the mysterious night sounds of the woods were audible in the distance. An owl in some far-off tree began its weird hooting. Pierre gave an impatient groan at the sound. They had had enough to endure without its uncanny cry. Finally, to divert his mind he began counting the hoots, and as he counted he unconsciously translated the numbers into the letters of the secret code of the brotherhood. Imagine his surprise when he found himself

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spelling out the letters P-I-E-R-R-E. This was repeated three times and then the sound ceased. In a flash he understood. It was the faithful François signaling to them. He hurriedly explained his discovery to Jean. The two boys then awaited with feverish interest a renewal of the cries. They were soon rewarded. "I-T—I-S—F-R-A-N-Ç-O-I-S," was the next communication. A thrill of joy and renewed hope filled them. "T-A-K-E—C-O-U-R-A-G-E," came the cheering sound. Then the hooting ceased, and the quavering cry of some other night bird took up the burden of the message. "S-T-A-N-D—O-U-T-S-I-D-E—Y-O-U-R—D-O-O-R—T-O-M-O-R-R-O-W—S-O—I—C-A-N—S-E-E—W-H-I-C-H—H-U-T—Y-O-U—O-C-C-U-P-Y."

The signal ended, and the boys, comforted, sank into a quiet sleep.

They were awakened in the morning by the entrance of one of their captors bearing food. This consisted of some underdone meat and several cakes made of pounded maize mixed with water and baked on the hot stones. They were



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very hungry and eagerly devoured the latter, but the meat they found tough and unpalatable. They did the best they could, however, fearing to offend by their refusal. Soon the Indian returned to bind their wrists again after they had finished their breakfast. Pierre asked to see the leader of the band, whom he knew spoke and understood French. In a few minutes he appeared. Pierre then requested that they be allowed to stand outside in the sunlight, complaining of the chill and closeness of their prison. After a moment's hesitation he assented, giving directions that their ankle bonds should be loosed so that they could stand upright. Their wrists, however, remained tied. Pierre ventured to ask him what they intended doing with them and when they should be restored to liberty, promising him a good reward from Jacques Ormesson if they were returned to Quebec at once. The only answer was a grim shake of the head.

The boys enjoyed the change from the darkness of the hut, and stood or sat as conspicuously as possible in front of the door during the day.

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They knew the eye of François would be searching for them from some hiding place. Toward evening they were led back inside, their ankles again tied securely, and after being given more food, they were left to themselves. They awaited anxiously for the time of François's arrival. Surmising that he would approach from the forest, they rolled themselves to the side of their prison facing in that direction. The same sounds of suffering in the adjoining hut greeted their ears when the village had settled to its slumbers. A few bird cries were heard, but none that could be interpreted as signals.

Finally, when their patience seemed about exhausted, they detected a slight rustling outside, close to the spot where they were lying. This stopped, and a muffled tapping was heard against the bark covering the hut.

Emboldened by this sound, Pierre called in a low whisper:

"François! is that you?"

"Yes," came the reply from the outside.

"*Grâce à Dieu!*" murmured Pierre devoutly.

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“Hush!” came the warning voice of François. “Do not speak any louder than necessary; there is no telling what eager ears may be listening. I only wanted to tell you that you are in imminent danger. Be ready to escape to-morrow night when I come. Conceal as much of your food as you can about you, so that you may have something to eat on our return journey. I hear some one coming! Good night! Have courage and all will be well.”

With these words François made his retreat, while the two boys hastily rolled themselves toward the middle of the floor. The bearskin at the entrance was lifted, and their guard entered to see that all was well. A glance at the captives lying where he had left them apparently asleep satisfied him, for he immediately quitted the hut, leaving its inmates to try and obtain the rest necessary to fortify themselves against the events of the morrow.

In the morning word was brought them that they were to seat themselves outside the door of the hut and remain there all day until permission

### COMRADES THREE

was given them to reënter it. This message caused the boys considerable uneasiness, as it seemed to intimate that something unusual was about to occur. Their anxiety proved to be well grounded, for before noon a shouting was heard in the forest near by, which was quickly answered by the villagers. In a few moments a crashing in the underbrush was heard and a party of about a dozen newcomers appeared, leading in their midst a captive Indian. Their arrival was greeted with shrieks of joy, and they were immediately surrounded by a jabbering, gesticulating crowd, who welcomed them even more vociferously when they beheld their prisoner. He was led to a point not far from that where Pierre and Jean were stationed, and a pile of skins being thrown on the ground, he was urged to seat himself thereon. The boys were much surprised at the courtesy and attention with which he was treated, so marked a contrast to the indifference and neglect which had been their lot. Food was brought in great abundance and placed before him, several of his captors

## COURAGE TESTED

kneeling beside him and feeding him. The prisoner, a young man of remarkable physical development, accepted all of these civilities with a stolid face, betraying neither pleasure nor distaste at the actions of his enemies. When he had finished a hearty meal he was left to himself, save a guard who stood near, the rest of the people having apparently satisfied their curiosity concerning him.

Soon the brothers' attention was attracted by a group of savages who were engaged in erecting a sort of scaffold in the open space in the center of the village, about six feet from the ground. Near at hand another party were digging a hole in which they planted a huge stake formed from a young green tree shorn of its branches. A few paces farther on a pile of dried sticks and twigs was heaped up by the women and children, who ranged the near-by forest, returning well laden with this inflammable material. Still others prepared two supports with a crosspiece on which several large kettles partly filled with water were swung. These sights aroused the boys' curi-

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osity, without at first affording any clew to their meaning.

But, when the heaps of dried wood were placed underneath the kettles and about the stake, there suddenly flashed across Pierre's mind the recollection of the tales he had heard of the horrible atrocities perpetrated by the Indians—the fiendish torture of hapless prisoners, white or red, and the cannibalistic feast that frequently followed. He understood now the meaning of these deliberate preparations, and the reason why they had been commanded to remain outside the door of their hut. Some terrible scene of savage cruelty was to be enacted, and it was decreed that they should be unwilling spectators of the horrible sight. He explained his fears to Jean, who paled a little at his brother's suggestion, but betrayed by a firmer pressure of the lips and a resolute look of the eyes, his manly determination to face whatever harrowing spectacle might be in store for them with all the fortitude he was able to summon.

Finally, the preliminaries were arranged. All

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labor ceased, and the inhabitants of the village assembled in a huge elongated semicircle, with the open side toward the boys, who could thus see everything that transpired. A deputation of the chief men approached the prisoner, removed his bonds, and assisted him with every appearance of kindness to arise. "Come," cried one in a coaxing voice, "will you not dance and sing for us, who are your friends?" Another exclaimed: "See, the sun is bright; the camp fires in your Iroquois towns far away burn high. Tell us of your own deeds, of the bravery of your tribe; how many bears and moose you have killed, the number of enemies you have slain."

In compliance, the captive stood calmly surveying the assembly of his tormentors with simple dignity and scorn. Although he knew full well the diabolical ingenuity that they would exercise for his torture, while before his eyes there lay all the arrangements for a revolting and agonizing death, yet he showed no sign of fear. His lips did not tremble nor his heart quail before the ferocious hatred that he recog-

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nized lying back of the friendly glances. Slowly and in perfect measure did he begin his march, stamping the ground and swaying his body from side to side, his voice raised in liquid, modulated tones, that were preliminary to the coming words. Before them all he passed, proudly defiant, bold, courageous. Soon his steps quickened, his movements became more animated as his chant burst into the full sweep of his death song. Boastfully he sang of the power of his people, of their number, their greatness, and their glory. With increasing arrogance did he extol the superiority of his tribe above all others, taunting his foes as being but a nation of squaws, fit only for the drudgery of the camp. Faster and faster he whirled, urged on by the encouraging cries of the crowd. His blanket was thrown aside, displaying in all its superb strength his breadth of chest and strength and suppleness of limb. Louder and yet more loud swelled his tones as he boasted of his own success in the chase, of the number of scalp locks that he had taken, of the terror among his enemies that his name inspired. Defiance



## COURAGE TESTED

after defiance did he hurl into the very faces of his captors. Suddenly he stopped amid a chorus of "ho! ho! ho!" uttered by the crowd, and folding his arms across his chest, that rose and fell tumultuously with feeling and exertion, he stood gazing haughtily about him, awaiting the next stage in the proceedings.

He had not long to wait, for his tormentors, arming themselves with stout sticks or clubs and knives, formed two parallel lines facing each other, leaving a passage clear between them. He was then led to one end, and at a given signal he darted down this perilous path amid a chorus of yells. Blows rained down upon him, on his head, his shoulders, breast, and back, wherever he could be reached by the clubs in the hands of his tormentors. Some, as he passed, slashed at him with their knives, leaving behind a spurting gash; others ran huge sharp-pointed splinters into his flesh that remained there like smarting thorns a continual source of pain. Finally, he emerged at the farther end of this lane of torture one mass of wounds and bruises, his skin drip-

### COMRADES THREE

ping with blood, but still defiant, proud, and boastful. He mocked them as a race of weaklings, who could not cause a brave Iroquois to wince or tremble, and jeered at their efforts to cause him suffering. Instantly he was surrounded by a maddened crew of shrieking fiends. His hands were seized, and one by one the nails were torn loose and the finger bones broken. Yet through the din, strong and passionate, arose his voice reviling, deriding, sneering. The crowd separated, some running to light the fires, others seizing burning bits of bark which they applied to his quivering flesh. The splinters still sticking in him were lighted and burned brightly as he once more began his dance. Live coals and hot stones were placed in his path, over which he passed composedly. A rush was made, and he was thrown upon the burning bush heap. He was up in an instant with a mocking cry, and seizing in his bare hands the flaming firebrands, he approached his enemy, throwing them into their faces. Again he was seized and again thrown into the flames. This time he arises with

## COURAGE TESTED

difficulty, but still the note of defiance and hatred sounds in his weakened voice. Dragged to the scaffold, he is pinioned to a crossbeam, while blazing fagots are applied to his feet. A caldron of boiling water drenches him. He chokes a moment, but soon regains his voice. Can the force of nature bear more? Yes, for a young brave adroitly scalps him, holding aloft the grewsome trophy before the screeching mob. Quick ere he die and pass out of their reach beyond the realm of suffering! A burning brand is passed into the socket of each eye. He shudders with the coming of the end. His voice by one superhuman effort is raised again for one last taunt of undying hatred, and then is silent. With a quick stroke his breast is opened and the feebly beating heart is torn out and tossed to the waiting throng below, where it is quickly cut into bits and swallowed, still warm and throbbing with the last spark of life, by the young men, that they may imbibe some of their victim's magnificent courage. The head is severed, while the limbs are dismembered and dropped into

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the bubbling kettles for the orgy of the coming night.

During this scene of savage cruelty and Satanic barbarity Pierre and Jean stood before their prison hut, their eyes shocked by the awful spectacle, their ears ringing with the terrible din. At length their strength gave way and they sank to the ground sick and trembling, striving to cover their heads and thus shut out the sights and sounds of the tragedy being enacted before them.

When the end had come, new cries caused them to look up, and they beheld the arrival of three stalwart braves, bearing with them a number of muskets, powder, and a huge cask of brandy. This latter was the object of greatest attention, for it was gleefully seized and put to one side under a strong guard to await the evening.

During the former excitement they were dimly conscious of many interested looks being directed toward them. Imagine their horror when they beheld the same group of men who had first approached the captive Iroquois with soft words now advance toward them with kindly gestures.

## COURAGE TESTED

The cords were removed and their wrists and ankles rubbed, while in a mixture of French and Algonquin their health was solicitously inquired after and many assurances of friendliness were expressed. A quantity of food was also brought and the two boys were led into their hut, where a repast was spread before them. The savages then withdrew, leaving the two brothers to themselves. They were almost paralyzed with horror, for they recognized what all this sudden friendliness and attention meant. The appetite of the Indians for blood had been but whetted by the torments of the first victim, and now craved further indulgence. *They were themselves destined for the torture.*

## CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH A RASH VENTURE IS MADE THAT ALMOST  
ENDS IN FAILURE

WITH the full realization of their terrible predicament came a moment of despair, when all their plans and hopes of rescue seemed doomed to failure. But soon a reaction set in and a firm determination to outwit their enemies, to match their own ingenuity and daring against the cunning of their ferocious foes, possessed their minds. Remembering the caution of François to prepare for coming emergencies, they filled their pockets with food, bits of smoked meat and maize cakes, while they ate as much as they could bear of the malodorous stew that had been given them. All despair vanished, and their pulses beat quick and strong with hopeful expectancy. Perhaps their torture was reserved for the morrow! If so, provided the faithful François did not fail them, they would be miles away ere dawn.

## A RASH VENTURE

If the brandy, mounting to the savage brains, would only induce forgetfulness of the hapless prisoners, instead of stimulating them on to a midnight orgy of pain and ferocious inhumanity!

Soon a couple of Indians entered to remove the remains of the captives' supper. They uttered friendly grunts and showed every apparent evidence of kindly feeling. Before leaving, however, they bound the boys again securely hand and foot. This augured well for their safety, as the Indians would undoubtedly have left them unbound if they had had any intention of making them undergo the ordeal that night.

Soon after dark sounds of festivity were heard. Pierre rolled his way to the entrance and beheld the open space of the village filled with savages. Some were gathered about the boiling kettles into which the dismembered fragments of the young Iroquois had been thrown. From the shouts and laughter that arose, Pierre judged that they were enjoying their cannibalistic repast. At a little distance from them a still larger group stood about the newly arrived brandy,

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which was poured into huge gourds and passed about, each drinker taking a copious draught of the scalding stuff before handing it on to his neighbor. Already had the fiery stimulant begun its work, for every moment the cries and shrieks from the crowd increased. Pierre noticed that no guard had been placed in front of the hut, the savages evidently relying upon their helpless bound condition to keep them captive.

Well satisfied at the state of affairs, Pierre returned to Jean and related to him his observations. They then both took up the same position they had occupied while talking to François the previous night, and waited anxiously for the first sound of his arrival.

An hour of suspense passed. Then a slight rapping on the outside was heard, followed by a familiar voice.

“Take courage, *mes amis*, all goes well. Do you, Pierre, watch by the door, and if you see anyone approaching whistle softly to Jean and he will warn me. Hasten, for our time is short.”

Pierre quickly did as he was bid. François



## A RASH VENTURE

began boldly to tear off the bark covering of the hut with a knife. He worked rapidly and without fear of being heard, as the tumult of the savages had reached so high a pitch that they would have heard nothing short of a rifle shot. When the bark was removed from a sufficient space, François attacked the upright saplings that formed the inner wall, quickly cutting and tearing until he had made a hole close to the ground large enough for him to squeeze through into the interior. A moment later and he had severed the bonds of the prisoners. With silent joy the three boys embraced each other again and again. François, however, warned the other two that no time was to be lost, and helped them through the opening he had made. They found themselves in the shadow of their prison, which mingled its shade a few paces back with that of the forest. As they passed the adjoining hut Jean stopped them. Again that cry of agony, of weakness, of death itself, came to their ears despite the shouts of the drunken savages. Again were heard the muttered French words that now and then merged

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into the articulate cry, "*Au secours!*" This cry for help touched the deepest chords of sympathy in the boys' natures. In a few hurried words Pierre told François of their neighbor's heart-rending cries and moaning of the night before. François was deeply moved. "Would that we could offer him some help," he murmured.

"We can," suggested Pierre.

"How?"

"By rescuing him the same as you have rescued us, and taking him with us."

"*Mon Dieu!* and make our own capture certain by the delay? Impossible!"

"Will not the brandy keep the Indians occupied and give us plenty of time?" persisted Pierre.

"Perhaps. But at any moment their inflamed minds may suggest to them the idea of seeking you out to add to the pleasure of their feast. We need every moment we can get before they discover your escape. It would be folly to attempt it."

Pierre wavered at these words, the good sense

## A RASH VENTURE

of which he readily appreciated. He was therefore about to give his reluctant consent to their instant departure when Jean spoke boldly:

“Folly or no folly, I shall never stir from this spot until we make the attempt. You two can go on if you will, leaving me the knife, but I shall remain and do my best alone. I can but fail and be recaptured. But I would rather endure all the torture those drunken fiends can devise than escape and forever after be haunted by the groans of the helpless white prisoner whom I might have saved but whom I did not even try to aid.”

Like the striking of steel against the flint did these noble words ring in the ears of his companions, causing the spark of self-sacrifice and gallant resolve to flash in their hearts. Each impulsively grasped one of his hands and silently pressed it. All three with one accord then turned their attention to their hazardous plan of rescuing the strange prisoner.

They discovered that the hut was a very old affair, the bark covering having been worn off by the force of the wind and rain, leaving the inner

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sapling wall bare. This, too, had rotted from long exposure, so that the branches could be pulled apart sufficiently to make an aperture wide enough for a man to slip through. This necessitated scarcely any cutting. The boys were delighted at the discovery, and quickly pressed their way inside.

They found themselves in a hut considerably smaller than that in which Pierre and Jean had been confined, ill-smelling and dark. Guided by the sounds uttered by the prisoner, they groped their way about until they found him lying on a heap of leaves. He was unconscious of their approach, but continued to rave and mutter in a weak voice, the only intelligible words being those that they had heard before, "*Au secours!*" which he repeated over and over. François, in feeling of his hand, was horrified at the discovery that it was literally nothing but skin and bone. He found that his arms and legs were in a similar condition. Evidently the Indians had abandoned their prisoner to a lingering death by starvation, and had almost succeeded in their

## A RASH VENTURE

fiendish desires. Drawing a hunter's flask containing water from his pocket, he applied it to the parched lips that eagerly partook of the life-giving fluid with a weak sigh of satisfaction. He then produced another containing brandy, a little of which he allowed to trickle down the sick man's throat. After a few moments the moans ceased. He then moistened a cake of maize that Jean handed him with the brandy, and carefully fed it to the unfortunate. By this time he was able to swallow, and ate the food offered him with a ravenous snarl more like that of a starving dog than a human being.

All of this procedure consumed considerable time. They had begun to prepare for their departure when they were all struck dumb with terror at a new danger which threatened them. The orgy of the savages had reached a point where some evil spirit had evidently reminded them of their two prisoners, for with a wild yell the whole company made a rush to the hut in which they had left them. The escape of the boys was now impossible. Their flight would be immediately

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discovered! They heard the footsteps of the maddened mob as it passed and surged about the entrance of their former prison. A partial silence ensued as several of the braves entered to drag forth the captives for the sport of the crowd. An instant later a yell of rage announced the discovery of the empty hut. With wild shouts and execrations they crowded in. One lighted a torch, whose glare quickly showed the hole in the wall through which the prisoners had passed. With more yells they rushed out and around to the back. Luckily for the boys the ground around the huts was hard, so that they had left no trail behind.

François held his breath and listened eagerly. If their foes determined not to pursue them, they were lost, for some one would undoubtedly think of the starving prisoner, and would enter to see if he, too, had escaped. The drunken crowd seemed to hesitate a moment. Then under the leadership of one of the braves who bore a torch, they made a dash for the forest in a body in eager chase of the captives who, they knew, could

## A RASH VENTURE

not be far away. Gradually they separated, going over the ground slowly, each party lighting a new pine stick as they left the rest.

François breathed freely once more. Going to the door of the hut he peered forth. By the light of the fires he saw that the village was deserted save by the squaws and children who still hung about the loathsome kettles. He then cautiously separated the saplings through which they had entered and listened. Not a sound was heard from the direction of the forest save the distant shouts of the pursuing party. He then returned to his companions.

“Quick!” he said. “This is our only chance!” and seizing the unfortunate prisoner he dragged him to the opening. Jean and Pierre held the branches aside while François hauled the sick man through. They then quickly followed. François stooped, and drawing their helpless friend on his back, started off, the others coming close on his heels. He pursued the track of the savages a short distance into the forest, then, turning sharply to the right, he made his way

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cautiously around the village until he came to a point directly opposite to that from which he had started, then plunged into the gloom and shadow of the woods again, stopping every now and then to listen for any sounds of the returning savages. Over fallen trees they scrambled, through bushes and vines they plunged, now down into the bed of a brook, now up the opposite bank. At length, after an hour or more of this exhausting work, they stopped for rest. François laid his burden upon the soft pine needles and gave him more strengthening food and liquid. The two brothers, breathless with fatigue, threw themselves panting upon the ground. Looking up through the tree tops, they could see the stars beginning to pale before the early streaks of dawn. Ere long the forest lost its gloom and a faint shadowy gray suffused itself among the trees. When it was light enough for them to see their way, François ordered the march to begin again. Once more did he place the burden upon his stalwart shoulders, and they advanced rapidly, fear lending strength to their wearied limbs.



## A RASH VENTURE

Suddenly he stopped with a gesture of silence. They all listened carefully. Far ahead the sound of distant shouts was heard. They turned to the left only to discern the sound of approaching savages in that direction; quick to the right they darted, but there, too, quavered the far-off answering cry of a returning party. They were surrounded by their enemies, who were evidently beating the woods carefully on their way back to the village. To retrace their footsteps meant certain capture. Instinctively they halted. François glanced about them with a desperate look. Not a moment could be lost. If anything was to be done, it must be done at once. With a muffled cry he sprang forward again. Before them stood the remains of a forest giant. A king among trees had it been at one time, but its proud head blasted by the lightning, its trunk eaten by hidden insects, it now stood a melancholy ruin, yet withal possessing still a regal air.

The keen eye of François had spied next to the ground a hole leading into its hollow trunk. This was their haven of refuge. Should they

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reach that in time and without leaving any trace of their entrance, they might yet be saved.

Quickly they stooped and scrambled into the gloomy interior of the huge trunk, which they found commodious enough for a dozen fugitives. Hastily retreating to the farthest side they lay down, covering themselves with the large quantity of leaves they found there, and waited the approach of their enemies with trembling hearts. Nearer and nearer came the shouts from three directions, until they knew that the savages must be but a few hundred yards distant.

At that moment a new danger presented itself. A low growl was heard, and a scratching as of sharp claws upon the ground; the dim light of the doorway vanished as a huge bear squeezed itself into the refuge the boys had chosen for themselves.

## CHAPTER XII

WHEREIN A DANGER IS ESCAPED AND SOME PER-  
PLEXITIES ARE SOLVED

FRANÇOIS understood the situation at once. The hollow tree was undoubtedly the animal's lair, to which he had naturally fled when disturbed in his nightly prowling by the approaching Indians. Hence it was that the fugitives were the real intruders.

It was a serious enough state of affairs to find the woods round about them infested with their savage enemies, but in addition to have to deal at close quarters in the dark with this already infuriated beast with no other weapon than a hunting knife was a condition that even the bravest of men could not face without dread.

The boys, however, realized that nothing could be gained by dwelling in thought upon the danger of their situation, and resolved to meet their

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perils as best they could. Their first effort was to avoid discovery by the bear. All would certainly be lost if, while the Indians were near at hand, the impending conflict with the huge animal was precipitated. Accordingly, they remained motionless among the leaves, scarcely breathing. François held his hand ready to smother any mutterings from their wretched companion, who luckily had fallen into an easy sleep. The bear did not prowl around the interior of the hollow tree, but watched and listened just inside the entrance, as though waiting for an attack from without. In a few moments the sound of voices and the crackling of broken twigs announced the arrival of a party of their foes in the open space about their hiding place. These halted as though to rest. François's heart sank. He had hoped that they would pass on without stopping. Every moment that they lingered increased the danger of the boys' discovery.

Presently a second party arrived from another direction, and in a few moments later a third came up. The fugitives had unluckily chosen

## DANGER AND PERPLEXITY

for their shelter the very spot selected as a meeting place by the various bands of their pursuing enemies. François was able, through his knowledge of the Indian tongue, to understand a good deal of their conversation. He thus learned that they were on their way back to the village, and had given up all hope of finding the escaped prisoners, attributing their success in eluding them to the action of some one of the various evil spirits in whom the Indians firmly believed. At last the signal was given to start, and François's anxiety was somewhat relieved. Imagine his horror when he heard one of the tribe whose brain was less befuddled with brandy than the rest mention the hollow tree before them as a possible place of concealment. This suggestion was hailed with a shout of approval. Several of the braves approached the entrance. One of them peered in, then getting down on all fours proceeded to enter, with the evident purpose of exploring the interior. He had advanced only halfway when the bear, who had been lying in wait for any intruder, brought his heavy paw down on the mid-

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dle of his back with great force, tearing the flesh severely with his sharp long claws. With a scream of pain the Indian disappeared, only to be greeted by a roar of derision from his comrades, to which sound the bear growled a gruff reply.

A moment later another Indian approached, and, after scratching on the ground to excite the attention of the bear, inserted the end of his musket inside the entrance. This action infuriated the animal the more, and he seized the muzzle between his teeth, endeavoring to crush it by the force of his powerful jaws. This was what the Indian wished, so he quickly pulled the trigger, sending the bullet through the bear's brain, who fell heavily forward dead. Two Indians, reaching inside, then seized each a paw and pulled the carcass through the hole in the tree and stretched it full length upon the ground. Knives were quickly used, and in a few moments the skin had been removed and the choicest parts of the meat cut off. The entire party then quietly took their departure without further investigation of the

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hollow tree, taking it for granted from the presence of the bear that the captives they were in search of were not there.

A full half-hour elapsed in silence before François stole forth to reconnoiter. When he finally did so, he found the place deserted. Calling to Pierre and Jean to come out, he busied himself in cutting off strips of bear meat that had been left by the savages. He ordered them to collect a small heap of leaves from the interior of the tree, while he drove two stakes into the ground with forked tops. A crosspiece was then laid upon them, and the strips of meat hung on it. Finding the right sort of dried wood, he began rubbing the surfaces of two sticks together in Indian fashion, until a smoldering flame was procured. This, when applied to the dried leaves placed beneath the strips of meat, soon made a fire which he carefully fed with selected twigs. He did this boldly, knowing from the words of their foes overheard that there were no other parties to follow. Not until all this was accomplished did he speak again.

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“A narrow escape, *mes amis*, was it not?” he exclaimed.

“I thought our end had come when I saw the bear enter,” Pierre replied.

“I did not fear the bear so much,” added Jean retrospectively, “because you will remember I killed one larger than he. It was when I saw the Indian’s head appear crawling stealthily in that everything grew black before my eyes, and I nearly fainted.”

“We must forget past dangers,” continued François, “and devote our energies to present affairs and provide for future perils. One of them, lack of food, I am already trying to take measures to avoid by preparing this smoked bear meat. Ah! Monsieur Bear,” he exclaimed laughingly, as he doffed his cap and bowed to the remains of the animal on the ground, “we indeed owe you much. Living, you guarded us against our enemies; dead, you provide us with sustenance for our journey. But come, to work, all of us. Do you, Jean, fill this water flask from the brook we hear off there to the left, while



## DANGER AND PERPLEXITY

Pierre can aid me in bringing our unfortunate friend out where he can have fresh air and daylight to aid in his recovery."

Carefully the man was partly carried, partly dragged from their retreat and laid down beside the fire. All three boys started back in surprise on thus beholding him for the first time. He was a Frenchman of medium height, whose age might have been anywhere between forty and fifty. His hair, streaked with gray, was long and matted, while a beard, tangled and dirty, covered his face. The skin was drawn tightly over the bones, which threatened every moment to burst through this thin covering. The eyes were sunken deep within their sockets, and glowed with the brilliancy of severe illness, yet lacked the look of human understanding as they moved restlessly from one object to another. His clothes consisted of a few ragged garments that only partially covered the emaciated form. Wherever the skin showed, terrible looking scars were visible, while the hands were knotted and twisted, without finger nails and with one thumb

### COMRADES THREE

missing—all mute witnesses of the terrible torture he had been through.

The three boys turned away for a moment, sickened at the horrible sight, but soon a sympathetic pity arose that overcame all other feelings. After giving him a copious drink of the fresh, cool water, he was allowed to eat sparingly of the food Pierre and Jean had brought with them, they themselves partaking of the tougher bear meat. After his hunger had been in a measure abated, the man sank into an unconscious state, half-sleep, half-stupor. The boys took turns at watching while the others slept. At length all awoke near sundown greatly refreshed. The fire, which had died out, was not relighted for fear of detection during the night. The entire party then retired to the hollow tree, the sick man to sink into a healthy invigorating sleep, the others to talk over their future plans.

“And now,” said Pierre, when they were all comfortably settled, “tell us what happened after your escape from the Indians in the canoe.”

“Yes,” chimed in Jean, “I am dying to know

## DANGER AND PERPLEXITY

how you managed to follow us without discovery."

"Well, to begin with," began François, "when I was sent to the river and saw the empty canoes, the idea of escape naturally suggested itself to my mind. I just made a hole in the big canoe so they could not follow me, and made off through the darkness in the smaller one. A half league up the river I hid the canoe with the gun, ammunition, and other things that it contained, marking the place carefully so we can get it again on our return. I took a hunting knife, two flasks of brandy, and some dried meat with me. I then returned by a roundabout way to the vicinity of the camp and climbed a tall tree at dawn, from which I was able to determine the direction taken by you and your captors. I easily followed your trail by day, hiding myself against surprise at night."

"To think," cried Jean, "that all the time when we felt so alone you were only a short distance off!"

"As soon as you reached the Indian village,"

### COMRADES THREE

continued François, "I hastened to the top of a pine tree a short distance off that overlooks the entire settlement, and at night began signaling to you. I could not tell whether you had heard my signals or not, until I saw you standing outside your hut the next morning. I prowled about the edge of the camp during the evening and picked up considerable information."

"Did you learn any reason for our capture?" inquired Pierre eagerly.

"Yes. I was able in the darkness to creep near one of the larger houses where the chief men of the village were talking. I learned that the leader of this portion of the tribe is none other than the infamous half-breed who has caused the Governor so much trouble. He is called 'The Rat' by the French from the way he has of slipping into some hole and escaping when his enemies have him surrounded and believe his capture certain. He it was whom one of you surprised in the middle of the night at your uncle's house. It seems that your uncle for some reason wanted you out of the way. He learned of the

## DANGER AND PERPLEXITY

existence of our cave by setting his negro servant Bolo to watch you. Every time you slipped out by means of your rope ladder, he followed you and reported your actions. Your uncle made a bargain with some friends of 'The Rat' to carry you off, paying them in guns, ammunition, and brandy for their trouble. The brandy that the Indians were drinking last night was part of the price paid for getting rid of you. I suppose, finding me in the cave with you, they determined to take me also for fear I might tell of your capture. He stipulated that no harm should happen to you while on the way. He even suggested that they adopt you into their tribe and bring you up as Indians, threatening you with death by torture if you ever deserted them."

A prolonged sigh of astonishment at thus learning of their uncle's baseness issued from the lips of the two brothers.

"But why did he hate us so?" queried Pierre. "Why did he not simply turn us adrift in Quebec?"

"He fears you have discovered some of his

### COMRADES THREE

secrets, and is afraid of your divulging them, no doubt, hence his desire to have you lost in the wilderness."

Instantly through the brothers' minds there flashed the memory of the midnight visitor, the signal lights, and all the mysterious sounds they had heard about the house, and they comprehended clearly their meaning.

"I was puzzled," continued François, "when the leader asked one of the chiefs about 'The Frenchman,' as he called him. The answer was that he was gradually growing weaker, that the food had been reduced each day, until nothing but a little water was now being given. When you told me about the sounds of suffering issuing from the neighboring hut, I understood. I also learned that an Iroquois prisoner was expected to arrive the next day, and that he would be at once tortured. Your case then came up for discussion. Several urged that you be adopted into the tribe, but the prevailing sentiment was for your death by torture, so it was decided to hold you over until the day after the Iroquois was

## DANGER AND PERPLEXITY

killed, so that they could prolong their cruel sport. The brandy evidently made them change their minds and decide to have all their pleasure at once. Now, no more questions, but all try to get some rest. There is no knowing how soon we can sleep all night again.”

## CHAPTER XIII

BEGINS WITH A FRIGHT FOR JEAN AND ENDS WITH  
A NOVEL JOURNEY

AT daybreak the entire party was astir. The sick man seemed greatly strengthened, and even attempted to hobble weakly about. His mind, however, was far from clear. Although at times apparently understanding in a measure what was said to him, he was unable to reply save by unintelligible mutterings. He often watched his companions with a look of curiosity and helpless anxiety that betrayed the struggle his reason was making to regain control of the physical system so grievously shattered by torture and starvation. After a hearty meal of fresh bear meat, hurriedly cooked over a tiny fire, they destroyed all evidences of their sojourn, and started off slowly, their unfortunate friend being carried in a sort of chair formed by the sturdy arms of Pierre and François.



## A FRIGHT AND A JOURNEY

“We shall go directly north,” explained the latter, “although every step in that direction is taking us farther from Quebec. The savages will count on our going toward the south, and will undoubtedly keep a sharp lookout for us during the next few days. We shall probably soon come to a small stream which we can follow to the river.”

Proceeding thus, with frequent delays for rest, the small party made its way through the forest, silent as regards all human sounds, but echoing with the animate voices of nature. Cries of birds flying from branch to branch overhead were mingled with the chatter of squirrels or the nearby crashing among the undergrowth of some wild animal startled from its seclusion by their approach. They slept that night at the foot of a giant tree, and never did weary limbs sink to rest on a soft bed more gratefully than did theirs on the yielding carpet of pine needles covering the ground. The next day was a repetition of the day before. Late in the afternoon they came to a large brook that splashed fussily over its stones in its haste to meet the larger river a few leagues

### COMRADES THREE

away. Beside this stream they spent the night, starting next morning to follow its course, keeping a short distance from its bank.

They had proceeded thus far without mishap or adventure, when shortly after noon there occurred an event that well-nigh put an end to Jean's further journeying. François and Pierre with their human load were leading, while Jean followed a short distance behind. They had just entered a small open space among the trees when François suddenly stopped. His practiced ear had caught a sound foreign to the usual noise of the forest. Signaling caution to the others, he listened silently for a moment.

"Indians!" he whispered warningly. "Hide!" At the word he directed Pierre with a motion of the head toward the underbrush at the left, and together they noiselessly bore their helpless comrade to a place of safety. Jean, who found himself nearer the right edge of the open glade which they had entered, sprang in that direction and hid himself behind a rotting log in front of the base of a stately pine. A wild vine had attached

## A FRIGHT AND A JOURNEY

itself to the surface of this log, covering it and the ground behind it with a profusion of leafy growth. Beneath its protecting cover he wriggled and lay close against the log, apparently perfectly concealed, while he was able to look out in safety through an opening between the leaves.

Several moments passed without any appearance of the enemy, and Jean began to think that François had been unduly alarmed, when he beheld at the farther end of the open space the forms of five savages emerging from the woods. On they came at a dogtrot in single file making their way noiselessly save for the occasional breaking of a twig under foot. It was evidently a hunting party, for the first four carried guns ready to hand for instant use should the alert glances which they cast from side to side reveal the sight of the desired game. The fifth, who lagged somewhat behind the others, carried no firearm, but bore on his shoulders the carcass of a young deer. Swiftly the silent company approached, passing within a dozen feet of Jean's hiding place. The leader had already plunged into the forest with

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his three companions. Jean had just begun to breathe a sigh of relief when he was horrified at beholding the last one of the party suddenly stop directly in front of him with his intent gaze directed on the very spot where his own eyes were peering forth. His heart gave a quick bound as he believed himself to be discovered. The Indian stood motionless and tense for an instant, then he quickly slipped the deer to the ground, snatched his hatchet from his belt, and raised it high in air. A wild fear seized Jean as he watched with fascinated gaze the movements of the threatening weapon. An instant later it left the upraised hand and came hurtling through the air toward him. He involuntarily closed his eyes, and with difficulty repressed a cry of terror. He heard the weapon strike the tree above and behind him. The redskin had missed his aim! He opened his eyes. The savage was running toward him. He jumped lightly over the log. A second later he had leaped back holding in one hand the glittering hatchet, in the other a dead squirrel, which he had spied upon

## A FRIGHT AND A JOURNEY

the tree directly over Jean's head, and which he had killed with a clever stroke. Returning the weapon to his belt he picked up the deer once more and disappeared after his companions, with the new trophy of his skill dangling from his hand.

Fully fifteen minutes passed before any of the fugitives stirred. Then François's head was cautiously protruded from its hiding place, and he looked and listened for a moment to make sure that there were no other savages following the hunting party. Presently all emerged and stood together in the glade. Jean related his harrowing experience. François smiled sympathetically as he pointed out the spot where he had lain.

"I do not wonder you were the least bit frightened. From your position you could not know what was going on behind you, and did not see the squirrel on the tree trunk. But come, we must not delay. There may be other bands of redskins roving in this neighborhood. I shall not be easy until we reach the river."

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That night they encamped upon the bank of the Ottawa. When the brothers awoke it was broad daylight, and they found themselves alone with their unfortunate companion. François had disappeared. Some time elapsed, and they were beginning to be a little anxious over his absence when they heard some one approaching. It was he, carrying a capful of berries, and with a cheerful, eager look upon his face that told of a happy discovery.

“Here!” he cried, “try these as a change for breakfast. I thought I would let you sleep while I started at sunrise on a tour of investigation. I knew we were running low in our stock of food, so I climbed a tree to a hole in which I saw a squirrel disappear. Just as I reached it he popped out his head, and I was lucky enough to catch him before he could retreat.” He pulled the body of the animal in question out of one pocket, and from the other drew a double handful of nuts. “I found he had not exhausted his store of last winter, so I brought these along too. Now, while we eat the berries and nuts, I will tell

## A FRIGHT AND A JOURNEY

you some good news. We will have to save Monsieur Squirrel to be devoured later."

All four proceeded to partake of the breakfast thus provided. François continued:

"I lay awake a long time last night thinking over the next step in our return. To continue on foot along the river until we came to the spot where I hid the canoe would be a long and difficult journey. There is no telling when we would come across just such another party of Indians as we did yesterday, and I fear we would not escape their notice as easily a second time. Besides, our means of procuring food when our present store is exhausted is too precarious. The only alternative to my mind was to build a raft and thus float down, but with only one knife with which to cut the necessary wood it would be weeks probably before we would be ready to start." Then seeing the look of consternation on Jean's face, he added laughingly: "Do not be alarmed, *mes amis*, for I have found a solution to the difficulty. *Le bon Dieu* has provided us with a boat, and all we have to do is to embark."

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To the eager inquiries of the boys he merely shook his head, and went on calmly munching his share of the nuts and berries he had brought.

When they had finished, they all repaired to a spot on the water's edge near by. Here they found that a large dead tree undermined by the spring flood had recently tumbled into the water, a few of its roots still clinging to the soil and alone preventing it from being swept away by the current.

"Behold our vessel!" exclaimed François, "that only lacks a rudder."

The remainder of the day was spent in fashioning a rude oar or sweep out of a young fallen tree, and by evening all was in readiness for their departure. The sick man was laid among the gnarled mass of roots, while the improvised rudder was thrust between them, so as to trail along behind. The few remaining attachments were cut, and the boys, springing aboard, soon swung out into the stream and their homeward voyage was commenced. By dint of hard work with the oarlike rudder, the strange craft was



## A FRIGHT AND A JOURNEY

guided in its course. A bright starlit night with a moon half full gave them sufficient light. The current, although not swift, was rapid enough to insure a much quicker progress than would have been the case had they attempted to proceed by land.

It was necessary to travel by night in order to escape observation, so the three lads remained awake, not a difficult thing to do under the circumstances. The stranger, in his secure location among the roots, slept peacefully.

Just before day François skillfully steered their ungainly looking vessel behind a point where there was little or no current, then by vigorous paddling and poling brought it close to shore. After landing, they made fast to the bank and clambered once more on to firm soil. They felt very stiff and tired from their night's ride, and after eating sparingly of their provisions sought the shelter of a near-by leafy thicket, and soon all were asleep.

In the evening they put off once more, and succeeded ere dawn in covering a considerable dis-

### COMRADES THREE

tance of their journey. Thus they proceeded, concealing themselves by day for rest and traveling by night. Nothing eventful happened save on the third night when, the current taking them close to shore, they passed a low burning camp fire about which lay the blanketed forms of six Indians.

The fifth night François began to scan anxiously the left-hand bank for sight of the landmark—two blasted pines near the waters of a quiet bay—by which he could recognize the spot where he had hidden the canoe. At last, just as dawn broke, he spied them, and an hour later they had landed, discovered the canoe, and were ravenously eating of the store of provisions and examining the firearms and ammunition it contained. Luckily everything had been preserved intact. Now that they were armed and had proceeded so near to the St. Lawrence, they decided to travel by daylight. Hence, disdaining any rest, they embarked at once, and soon their flashing paddles were sending their swift craft rushing through the water toward Quebec.



“They passed a low burning camp fire.”



## A FRIGHT AND A JOURNEY

The sick man, while still very weak, sat in the stern contented and happy, each day showing a further stage in his mental recovery. Soon the St. Lawrence was reached, and they felt that all danger was now past. On they sped by day, resting before a warm camp fire by night. Good game fell before their aim, and so all physical evidence of the hardships they had endured soon disappeared.

La Prairie was passed; then Montreal. Their desire to reach home prevented them from stopping anywhere. Finally, after four days longer, the distant view of the fort burst upon their vision. They greeted the sight with a cheer, and pressed on until, just as the great clock of the château tolled midnight, they landed at Quebec.

## CHAPTER XIV

DEPICTS A GLAD HOME-COMING FOR THE TRAVELERS  
AND ONE OTHER

TOGETHER the four voyagers climbed the steep street leading up from the lower town. The sick man had recovered sufficient strength, after his long rest in the canoe, to enable him to walk slowly without assistance. The town was silent, save for the distant cry of the sentries changing post on the battlements above them, and the streets seemed deserted. Quietly and carefully they proceeded within the shadows lest they should meet some late comer who, perchance recognizing some one of them, might spread abroad the news of their return. Naturally they directed their steps toward the house of Jacques Ormesson, he who had been their counselor and friend. They knew his sympathy and friendship

## A GLAD HOME-COMING

could be relied upon to aid them in their present plight.

At length they stood before his shop door, dark and forbidding in the midnight shade. Pierre, bidding the others await him there, ran around to the side beneath the window of the room he knew his friend occupied. Feeling on the ground he found a pebble, which he tossed gently against the glass. The click produced no effect. He threw another. Still no response. A fear seized him that perhaps the trader was not at home, but had left the city on some business errand. A third time he hit the glass. This resulted in the window being opened and a voice calling harshly, "Who's there?" For all its gruffness, Pierre recognized it as belonging to his friend. "It is I, Pierre Bordeleau," he replied in a low tone.

"*Mille tonnerres!*" was the astonished rejoinder as the window was opened to its full extent and a head was thrust out into the darkness.

"It is I, *mon ami*," continued Pierre. "We

## COMRADES · THREE

have all returned in safety, and are waiting at your door. Will you not hasten down and let us in?"

"*Grâce à Dieu!* It is he indeed," exclaimed the excited Ormesson as he quickly withdrew his head and shut the window with a bang.

Pierre returned to his companions at the front of the house. Presently a glimmer of light was seen beneath the sill, the sound of bars being removed was heard, and the door swung open, revealing the eager figure of the trader in his night attire, holding a candle in one hand while he peered anxiously forth at the small group. They entered, and he quickly shut the door and barred it, then turning to his companions held the light to their faces with a look in which joy and incredulity were struggling for the mastery. A glance was sufficient to reassure him. Putting the candle down upon the counter he sprang forward, and seizing the two brothers in his strong grasp he embraced them heartily, then holding them at arm's length he gazed at them affectionately for a moment, and almost crushed them again in his



## A GLAD HOME-COMING

arms, so great was his fervor. Then for the first time did he realize that the boys were not alone. Quickly recognizing François, he gave him a hearty welcome. His eyes fell upon the stranger, who stood gazing with a helpless, puzzled look at the shelves filled with their stock of skins and goods, partially revealed by the flickering light of the candle. The trader turned an inquiring glance toward Pierre. The latter answered his mute question in a low voice. "A sick man whom we have brought back with us. He is not quite right here," touching his forehead. "He is weary. If you will give him a bed, we will await your return. We have a long story to tell."

Ormesson nodded and, leading the way to his little sitting room back of the shop, lighted another candle, stirred the dying embers on the hearth, flung on some wood, and, motioning to the boys to remain, beckoned to the stranger and disappeared with him up the stairs. In a few moments he returned alone, partly dressed. "A pitiable sight indeed," he exclaimed. "The poor wretch was completely worn out, and was asleep

### COMRADES THREE

before I left his room." Then going to a cupboard, he produced some cold meat, bread, a bottle of wine, and some glasses, which he placed before his guests, who were not slow to help themselves. He then lighted his pipe and, leaning back in his chair, sat silently puffing while he watched the boys with an air of delight and intense satisfaction. When they had finished eating he broke the silence.

"Now, *mes amis*, that you have eaten, you will perhaps let me hear the sound of your voices to assure me that I am not dreaming, and tell me from what quarter of the universe you have dropped at this hour of the night. Hasten, for I am fairly bursting with curiosity."

"It is a long story," answered Pierre, "and I shall commence at the beginning and tell you the whole history of our adventures."

He then began his recital with an account of their surprise and capture in the cave, followed by a rapid yet full narrative of all that had happened to them since that event.

The trader listened attentively to every word

## A GLAD HOME-COMING

in silence, the nervous pull at his pipe and the clouds of smoke he emitted from his mouth betraying his absorbing interest. When Pierre described the torture of the Indian brave, and told of their discovery that they were to be treated in a like manner, he stopped smoking and sat open-mouthed, with a gaze of affectionate anxiety upon his honest features. When he learned of François's appearance upon the scene with a view to their rescue, his face lighted up and he muttered "Bravo!" When he heard of Jean's insistence in the face of great danger on the rescue of the unknown prisoner, his feelings overmastered him and, rising, he seized him in his arms and fairly shook him with admiring delight. "Noble youth!" he cried. "Would that my blood were in your veins and I could claim you as mine! But, pardon, I will not interrupt again," and resuming his seat he relighted his pipe. He chuckled with delight at their final escape, and laughed heartily at the episode of the hollow tree. He remained quiet until Pierre related what François had overheard regarding the perfidy of

### COMRADES THREE

their uncle. Then with a cry he threw his pipe across the room, and springing to his feet walked up and down in a fury. "Villain, rascal, rogue, knave, scoundrel, miscreant, vile wretch, fiend!" he exclaimed in his anger. "I suspected some of his contemptible work at the start, but my imagination never conceived such vile depths to his reprobate nature."

When he had quieted himself he stopped before the fire. "I, too, have a tale to tell and news to communicate that will prove of interest to you. The day after your departure I learned from outside sources that you had disappeared. I hastened to the house of Captain Bordeleau for information, and found him apparently in a state of great excitement over your absence. He took me to your room, showed me the rope ladder still fastened to your window, and declared his belief that you had taken to the woods to enter upon the wild roving life of the *coureurs-de-bois*. The fact that François also could not be found strengthened his view. I sympathized with him, but, of course, believed you were safe in the cave.

## A GLAD HOME-COMING

Not hearing from you during the next few days, I went myself to 'Chimney Rock,' which you told me was directly over your hiding place, and called to you. On receiving no response I hastened to the city and conferred with the Governor. In the mean time your uncle had publicly offered a reward of a hundred louis for information concerning your whereabouts. Finally, a *censitaire* living on the other side of the river appeared to claim the reward, saying that while hunting he had discovered a small party of Iroquois making their way southward toward their own country. He hid on their approach, and as they passed him he declared he saw three white youths being led along as prisoners. Your uncle then offered to pay a thousand louis for your safe discovery and return, and sent several small parties at his own expense in the direction it was reported the band of Iroquois had taken. They returned empty-handed, of course. He then appealed to the Governor Frontenac to allow him to go at the head of an expedition of five hundred soldiers against the Indians. The Governor sym-

## COMRADES THREE

pathized with him in his distress, but because of the threatened English invasion by sea dared not spare any of his forces. Your uncle then shut himself up in his house for a week, ostensibly to mourn for you. *Ma foi!* he acted his part well and deceived everyone, even myself, who had reason to suspect him. At length, I, too, gave up hope and regarded you as dead, for I well knew what the fate would be of any French captive that might fall into those devils' hands at the present time. But now, *grâce à Dieu*, you are returned safely," and he gazed silently at the boys, the light of a great joy shining from his moistened eyes.

After a moment or two of silence he again spoke.

"Many changes have occurred since you left. The country is threatened with an invasion by the English, who are reported to be ascending the St. Lawrence in full force under Sir William Phips, of Boston. In fact a messenger arrived to-day reporting that the fleet had already advanced above Tadousac. Quebec is newly for-

## A GLAD HOME-COMING

tified on its weak side, and many of the soldiers have been withdrawn from Montreal and Three Rivers for its defense. You have come in time to witness stirring events, and perhaps have a share in them. But first must be decided what you will do next. The sick man can be left in my care. As to yourselves, I know not what to say. It will never do for your uncle to learn of your return at this time. In the confusion and excitement of an attack upon the city, there is no knowing what bloody deed he might not be able to effect against you. He is capable of anything."

"Why not go back to the cave?" suggested François simply.

"And run the risk of capture by the English?"

"I will guarantee that they will never discover us," replied Pierre, who waxed enthusiastic at the thought of once more taking up their abode in their secret place. "Besides it will keep us out of our uncle's way, and who knows but that we might be of some service against the enemy by learning of their plans?"

### COMRADES THREE

“Yes, or blowing up one of their ships by night,” exclaimed Jean valorously.

“Leave such warlike measures to those whose trade it is to fight, *mon ami*,” replied the trader with a smile. Then added thoughtfully: “I do not know but after all François’s suggestion is good. You are distant far enough to avoid danger from the enemy and can keep out of your uncle’s way. The attack will be over in a short time, as I understand there are but two thousand in the approaching force, while in two days more we will have over three thousand here for the defense. And now,” he continued briskly after a few moments of thoughtful silence, “that we have decided the matter, you must be off at once; it lacks but two hours till day.”

The party thereupon broke up, the three boys leaving as they had returned, taking with them a load of blankets and provisions as well as ammunition forced upon them by the kind trader.

They regained their canoe without discovery, and soon had left the city behind them, paddling



## A GLAD HOME-COMING

swiftly toward their new dwelling place, until at the first gray of dawn they entered the cave, and, thoroughly tired, flung themselves contentedly down to sleep in peace within its familiar shadows.

## CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH THE GOVERNOR RECEIVES AN INSOLENT  
MESSAGE AND THE TWO BROTHERS MEET WITH  
A GREAT SURPRISE

DAY dawned, and while the boys slumbered an unaccustomed scene was enacted upon the mighty river. Scarcely had the morning mists vanished when up swept the forces of the English, thirty-four sail in all. One by one they passed the Point of Orleans, and glided noiselessly into the Basin of Quebec. A half dozen were large ships, the rest dwindled down in size, brigs and schooners, until finally some there were no larger than fishing craft. One by one they dropped anchor and furled sails, while from each masthead there broke the cross of St. George, amid lusty cries of "God save King William" from the men who swarmed the decks. From the flagstaff at the Château St. Louis,

## AN INSOLENT MESSAGE

perched on the giant rock, there floated a white banner, spangled with *fleur-de-lis*, boldly waving defiance in the morning breeze, while the crowds of soldiers, *coureurs-de-bois*, peasants from the outlying farms, and townsfolk shouted derision at the motley craft below them, and cheered heartily for their beloved monarch, Louis XIV.

About ten o'clock a boat put out from the flagship flying a flag of truce. It was met halfway by several canoes from the landing place. The boat contained a young officer who bore a letter from Sir William Phips to the Governor. He was allowed to land, and, after being carefully blindfolded, was led to the upper town. In order to bewilder him a circuitous route was taken, now up, now down. Barricades were met with over which he was compelled to climb, while all the while a large crowd accompanied him, creating as much stir as possible, so as to impress him with the large number of the defenders. Finally the Château was reached, and when he had entered the Governor's room the bandage was removed from his eyes and he found him-

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self in the presence of Frontenac, haughty and stern, and his officers, resplendent in their bright uniforms, all wearing a determined and warlike demeanor. He saluted the Governor with respect, and presented him with the letter which he bore. Frontenac handed it to an interpreter who translated it aloud. In brief it was a complaint of the various inroads made by the French against the English colonies in the past, ending with a formal demand for the surrender of Quebec.

“I, the aforesaid William Phips, knight, do hereby, in the name and in the behalf of their most excellent majesties, William and Mary, king and queen of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland, defenders of the faith, and by order of their said majesties’ government of the Massachusetts Colony in New England, demand a present surrender of your forts and castles, undemolished, and the king’s and other stores, unembezzled, with a seasonable delivery of all captives. Your answer positive within an hour is required upon the peril that will ensue.”

## AN INSOLENT MESSAGE

The young English officer then pulled his watch out of his pocket, showed Frontenac that it was ten o'clock, and that he must have his answer before eleven. The general insolent tone of the message provoked a cry of indignation from the group of officers surrounding the governor, one of them even exclaiming that Phips was nothing but a pirate and his messenger should be straightway hanged.

Frontenac rebuked their lack of courtesy, and turning to the young officer replied:

"I will not keep you waiting so long. Tell your general that I do not recognize King William. That he who so styles himself is a usurper. I know no King of England but King James. Even if your general offered me conditions more gracious, and if I had a mind to accept them, does he suppose that these brave gentlemen," waving his hand toward his officers, "would give their consent and advise me to trust a man who broke his agreement with our Governor of Port Royal, or a rebel who has failed in his duty to his King? I will give you no written answer to

### COMRADES THREE

your commander's insolent demand. Tell him I shall answer him only by the mouths of my cannon, that he may learn that a man like I am is not to be summoned after this fashion. Let him do his best, and I will do mine." With a bow of dismissal Frontenac turned and walked away.

The English officer was then blindfolded, led over the barricades again, and sent back to the fleet by the boat that brought him. Frontenac then assigned his officers to their respective positions, ordering them not to fire until the enemy had sent the first shot. The moments passed in eager expectancy. The gunners waited with fuses lighted and cannon trained on the hostile fleet. Mass was said in the cathedral and prayers for success were offered. The townspeople sought safety behind the doors of their own houses. A half-hour passed. Then a signal appeared upon the flagship, a sudden activity arose on board all the vessels, anchors were raised, and the entire flotilla drifted down with the current to a point half a league below Quebec, where anchors were again dropped and a

## AN INSOLENT MESSAGE

council of war was held. This lasted all day and night came on with nothing done. The attack had been postponed until the morrow.

Meanwhile the boys slept peacefully, unconscious of the warlike events occurring at their very door. It was long past noon when they awakened. François, looking out of the mouth of the cave, beheld the surface of the river dotted with the foreign fleet. Hastily summoning his companions, he pointed out the new arrivals. Together they spent the afternoon watching the boats going and coming between the different vessels, conveying officers to the war council on board the admiral's ship, carrying orders and distributing ammunition among the smaller craft. Toward sunset the sky became overcast, and the short twilight quickly faded into night. François announced his determination to slip out in the direction of Beauport, and see if he could not learn from some one what the probable course of events would be. He promised to return by midnight and advised the two brothers not to stir out.

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For a long time the boys sat looking out into the night, watching the twinkling of the lights on board the fleet, and conversing in low tones. At length Pierre yawned and exclaimed in a peevish voice: "I do not see why François should have left us behind. He is actively engaged while we are shut up here accomplishing nothing; we might as well be prisoners in the Indian hut."

Jean was silent for a moment. Then without apparently noticing his brother's remark:

"I wish while François is busy on shore that we might visit those lights out yonder and learn what sort of people the English are."

"We might go in the canoe; it is so dark I do not think we would run much risk of being seen," replied Pierre.

"Agreed."

In a moment they had dragged forth the canoe from its hiding place. In another they were launched and paddling swiftly toward the distant fleet. Neither spoke, but both bent to the work with a will. Soon they approached one of



## AN INSOLENT MESSAGE

the lights. It was that of a small vessel. The night was so still they could hear the voices of men on deck chatting and laughing in subdued tones. They passed on. Soon the dim outlines of a large ship were visible ahead. They glided under the bow. No sound was heard save the slight rippling of the current against the anchor chain. As they drifted by they could make out the form of a small boat attached to the landing stage. They waited, thinking that some one was about to leave whom they could follow. No one appeared. Silently they dropped beneath the stern. The windows were open and a soft light suffused itself through the darkness. The low murmur of voices engaged in earnest conversation was heard. They floated away. As soon as they were out of earshot Jean whispered to his brother: "Let us go back. I can draw myself up by the rudder chains; perhaps I will overhear their plan of attack discussed. Do you keep the canoe ready for me to drop into when I wish to leave." In a moment they had returned. Jean laid aside his paddle and at the

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right instant obtained a firm hold and drew himself silently up and soon was safely perched just beneath the open window. He dared not look in, but placed his ear as near as possible and listened.

The voices were stilled. A rustling as of a sheet of heavy paper being unrolled broke the silence. Then a voice sounded that made Jean gasp.

“Here is a rough sketch of Quebec and its surroundings. The city is impregnable except in one spot. If you once gain that, the place is yours. Under cover of darkness you must land your men here. Let them follow up the right bank of the St. Charles and conceal themselves in a large wooded area they will find here. While you engage the attention of the defenders by a brisk cannonade from the river by your entire fleet, your party in ambush must cross the St. Charles by the ford indicated here. Once crossed, with a sufficiently large body of men, you can enter the city from this side.”

Jean's eyes grew large with wonder. It was

## AN INSOLENT MESSAGE

his uncle's voice he heard thus directing the enemy to victory. An interpreter was translating each sentence into English.

“I shall be in command of the force guarding the ford. After firing one volley at your men as they rush from cover, I shall announce that our ammunition is exhausted and give the order to retreat. The fault will be yours if you do not succeed. If you decide to accept my terms, send your representative to-morrow night at midnight to that rock on the bluff near the shore that looks like a chimney—we call it ‘Chimney Rock.’ Let him bring with him one thousand louis in gold, and bills on the royal treasury drawn for the equivalent of ten thousand louis more, signed by yourself and countersigned by your second in command. The price is absurdly cheap. In addition my life is to be protected and I am to escape to Boston in the first vessel that leaves if I so desire. My house, which will be marked by a white cross chalked on the door, is to be preserved for me with all that it contains.”

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Some one moved toward the window. Jean heard his step and dropped lightly down into the canoe and they floated away. "Let us go back to the cave," was all that he said. On arriving there they found that François had returned. He had learned little and was disappointed. Jean then related what he had overheard. Pierre gave a long whistle. François was silent.

"What are you going to do?" Pierre queried.

"I hardly believed my own ears," was Jean's reply. "But I could not be mistaken. However, there is but one thing to do when a treasonable plan is on foot to betray the colony. The governor must be informed in some way, so that the plot can be frustrated. I would suggest that we go and tell Jacques Ormesson all I have learned. His older head will readily devise the proper action to take."

Without a further word all three descended to the river and soon were making the canoe skim rapidly toward the city. In their haste they nearly ran into one of the enemy's boats lying at anchor without lights. The noise they made was

## AN INSOLENT MESSAGE

heard, for a shot was fired in their direction, but went wide of the mark. Exercising more care they finally reached Quebec. Leaving François in charge of the canoe they stole quickly up the street. Although it was nearly midnight many people were abroad, but they escaped observation and were soon at the trader's shop. A light burning in his back room showed that he was still up. In a few minutes they were all three busily talking. When Jean finished recounting his recent experience, Jacques Ormesson betrayed no excitement. "At last," he exclaimed, "his crimes have found him out. Come with me!" he continued, as he reached for his hat.

"Where are we going?" asked Pierre.

"To see the Governor."

Jean faltered. "I do not want to be the means of injuring my uncle," he exclaimed anxiously.

"You want to do your duty to the King and Colony. Come!" was the trader's stern answer.

Together they approached the Château. The Governor, who had just finished a council with his officers, was alone.

### COMRADES THREE

"I have come to present to your Excellency the two nephews of Captain Bordeleau, who recently disappeared," began Ormesson.

The great man looked curiously and with sympathy at the boys. "*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed heartily, "I am rejoiced to hear you have escaped from the hands of those red devils the Iroquois."

"Not from the hands of red devils, your Excellency," replied the trader, "but a white one."

Frontenac looked puzzled. Ormesson related very briefly the experiences of the brothers. Then told of their uncle's connection with the affair. The Governor frowned heavily. "That is a hard accusation to make against an officer," he muttered.

"But I have one still harder," was the quiet reply. "Jean, do you tell his Excellency what you have overheard to-night. Spare nothing, remembering that your duty to your King and country far exceeds that due your scoundrel relative."

## AN INSOLENT MESSAGE

Jean did as he was bid, speaking at first with a good deal of trembling at finding himself talking face to face with the famous Governor. But, reassured by a kindly smile, he related in full detail the conversation on the English vessel. As he proceeded the Governor's brow darkened, his hands were clinched, and a red flush mounted to his forehead. When he had finished, Frontenac rose from his chair and stamped heavily about the room in anger.

"*Peste!*" he exclaimed hotly. "Has not the King foes enough among the savages and English but that there must be found some in his own household, those that draw his pay and swear to defend his honor and possessions, that must needs traffic in treason! *Ventre bleu!* and does this snake, this vile reptile, cover his tracks so well that not one of my trusted men, my friends, my intimates, knows anything whatever about this base plot, and it is left to babes to warn me of the impending blow the moment before it falls?"

Then subduing his emotion he approached the

### COMRADES THREE

two boys and laying a fatherly hand on each he said calmly:

“You have done good work this night. I shall remember it. The King himself shall hear of it. And you, too, Ormesson, you have once more proved yourself the honest, straightforward, loyal subject and friend as of yore; you shall not be forgotten either.”

Then, pausing in thought a moment, he beckoned the trader to him, and in a low voice continued: “Keep them with you for a few days. They must not be present when the net is drawn. Come to me alone to-morrow.”



## CHAPTER XVI

DEALS MAINLY WITH MILITARY AFFAIRS. SHOWS  
HOW A TRAP WAS SPRUNG AND A BATTLE WON

ON leaving the Château the trader directed the boys to return to François and bring him with them to his house. In the morning they breakfasted early. Jean inquired after the sick man, and was informed that he had been sent to the home of a doctor who had taken entire charge of him, and that he was improving rapidly. Ormesson warned the boys against stirring out during the day, and leaving them to their own devices set out again for the Château. The Governor received him warmly:

“I have been trying to think of some plan whereby positive corroborative evidence of Captain Bordeleau’s guilt can be obtained, but I confess I have failed so far. What have you to suggest?”

“Suppose your Excellency, together with a

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trusted officer, were to be present at the meeting to-night between the plotters, and witness the payment of the price agreed upon."

Frontenac laughed. "I fear Captain Bordeaux and the English emissary would object to my presence at such an interesting moment."

The trader then described the location of the cave. "If your Excellency were to be in hiding there you could undoubtedly overhear all conversation held between them. The opening extending from the interior of the cave through the cleft in 'Chimney Rock' would easily carry the sound of their voices."

The Governor brought his fist down upon his chair with a resounding blow.

"*Parbleu!*" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "A capital idea! We will destroy their plot with a counterplot, and match our cunning against theirs. But how can we find the cave without the assistance of the two lads? I am unwilling to force them to be witnesses of their uncle's downfall."

"Their companion, François, will have no

## A TRAP AND A BATTLE

compunction about aiding in bringing the traitor to justice. He can guide you."

"*Tres bien!* Do you arrange with him to direct us. You must be one of the party. Have a canoe ready and bring him with you to the Château at nine o'clock."

All day the garrison and its hardy defenders maintained an attitude of vigilance, ready to repel any attack, Frontenac fearing lest the English might decide not to accept Captain Bordeleau's offer of assistance. The distant fleet, however, remained quietly at anchor, and the day was passed without any warlike movement being made on either side.

At nine o'clock precisely Ormesson and François appeared at the Château. A few moments later they descended to the Lower Town in company with the Governor and one of his officers, carefully muffled to escape recognition, and after silently embarking started for their destination. The night aided their effort, for a light rain was falling, thus rendering easy the task of slipping by the enemy's ships without detection.

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A season of vigorous paddling ensued, then they turned inshore and landed. The canoe was carefully hidden among the bushes, and the party entered the cave. After an hour's silent waiting, François, who had remained on watch at the entrance, reported the appearance of a boat. Presently the muffled stroke of oars was heard, followed by a slight grating sound as the bow touched the land. Two figures were dimly visible disembarking and disappeared up the bank. The party then collected directly underneath the opening in the roof. Soon they heard the approach of the English emissaries, who stood beside the rock talking in an undertone, awaiting the arrival of the traitorous captain. Presently the sound of some one approaching from the land side was heard, then came in low tones a voice that all recognized.

“ Well, your commander has decided to accept my terms? ”

“ He has,” was the reply of the officer, who spoke French.

“ Have you brought the gold and the bills? ”

## A TRAP AND A BATTLE

“Here they are. I will unhood this lantern and you can count them for yourself.”

Breathlessly the listeners waited. The sound of clinking metal came to their ears as the traitor examined it.

“The amount is correct,” he presently said, “and the bills are properly drawn. Tell your commander I shall faithfully fulfill my part in the transaction. Have your men in ambush by dawn. Remember, after the first volley, when you attack the ford, there will be no opposition. Recollect, too, that the house with the white cross chalked on the door is to remain untouched. That is all, *messieurs*; may victory be yours. Good-night.”

The boat with the English officers had been gone a full half-hour before the Governor and his companions emerged from their hiding place and started homeward. On landing, the Governor walked rapidly toward the Château. “The evidence is complete,” he said in a stern voice to Ormesson as they separated. “Woe be to the guilty man!”

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Morning dawned, at first misty, but soon clearing. The city was early astir. Captain Bordeleau left his home shortly after daybreak to attend a final meeting of the officers at the Château. As he closed the door he turned, and drawing a piece of chalk from his pocket carefully made a cross upon its panels. His eyes gleamed with suppressed excitement, and a satisfied smile played for a moment upon his lips. An instant later, when he resumed his walk, his face was immobile and presented to the world only the stern look of a brave soldier laden with the responsibilities of his position.

The plan of defense was once more gone over carefully by Frontenac and his officers, as the deferred attack was now imminent, a report of the approach of the hostile fleet having been received. The Governor dismissed the group after giving detailed orders to each one. Turning to Captain Bordeleau, he rested his cold, stern eyes upon him. "To you I have assigned the defense of our weakest point, that facing the ford of the St. Charles. It is of vital impor-

## A TRAP AND A BATTLE

tance that you hold it obstinately against all odds."

Captain Bordeleau bowed respectfully. "I feel honored by your confidence, your Excellency, and shall do all that human power can accomplish in behalf of King and Colony this day." And with this final lie upon his lips he retired.

Up the river swept the flotilla bent at last on an attack that should humiliate the proud fortress of the King of France, with flags flying, drums beating, and the crews shouting themselves hoarse with cries of "God save King William." The French on their part were no less noisy. Their yells of defiance were mingled with cries of joy at the opportune arrival of seven hundred men, consisting of regular soldiers *coureurs-de-bois*, and lusty young farmers from up the river. These entered the western gate full of fight, and singing and whooping in their eagerness to meet the enemy. Soon the fleet reached a position before the town and anchored. Its guns were pointed at the fortress

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and the battle began. The French replied vigorously, and ere long the river and rock became one mass of smoke, from which belched forth the spiteful red tongues of flame. The noise was deafening as the cannon roar reverberated from the heights and rolled back from the distant mountains upon the scene of conflict. The guns of the fleet were poorly aimed, and many of the shot struck the side of the cliff, dropping harmlessly below. Some of the stone buildings were struck, but save a few splinters of rock that fell, little damage was done.

The guns of the fort, by Frontenac's direction, were centered upon the four largest ships. This action soon bore results. One of them hauled off and abandoned the fight. The admiral's vessel suffered most. The rigging was torn, the main-mast splintered, the hull riddled with shot, until, her condition becoming desperate, Phips ordered her to be cut loose from her anchor, and she gradually drifted out of range of the fire from the fort, amid the cheers and exultant cries of the defenders, who saw her slowly fade away



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through the smoke. Several of the smaller craft were almost in a sinking condition, and soon followed the admiral's lead. The rest managed to keep their positions with bulldog persistence, and endeavored bravely to silence a battery in the Lower Town.

Meanwhile a force of English, thirteen hundred in number, who had lain since before day shivering and impatient in ambush near the ford on the St. Charles, had broken from cover at the first sound of cannonading on the river. Some five hundred men under Captain Bordeleau were posted to resist their advance. At the first rush they fired a deadly volley into the enemy's ranks, who pushed bravely on, heedless of the fallen. The French were reloading and about to send another volley after the first, when in the lull the voice of their commander was heard excitedly exclaiming:

“Back, men, to the city! Our supply of ammunition has been detained. They are four to our one. You will all be slaughtered!”

His soldiers paused confused. To retreat

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after firing only once seemed cowardly. Again came the summons in more authoritative tones. A few of the more impetuous ones, disregarding all discipline, fired again. The majority, although chafing inwardly, turned to withdraw. At this moment the deep bass tones of Frontenac, who appeared suddenly from the rear, reached their ears.

“For shame! Are you cowards to turn tail at the first blow from the heretic English? Your ammunition is here, and I bring seven hundred reënforcements. At them again for King and Colony!”

The retreating line halted and faced about with a shout and poured into the oncoming ranks a fire that caused them to waver.

“Once more and they will run,” came the cheering voice of the Governor.

They obeyed, and the enemy’s line halted and slowly began to recede. Captain Bordeleau stood blankly staring at the burly form of Frontenac, stupefied with surprise and alarm. Why had the Governor appeared so inopportunist? He had

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thought he was superintending the fire from the citadel. Quickly recovering himself, he started forward to urge his men on to action. But the governor motioned sternly to him.

“Back to the city, whither you were about to lead your force. You are wanted here no longer,” he said angrily. Then turning to two officers who had accompanied him, he commanded: “Disarm him and bind his wrists. He is under arrest. Take him to the Château and guard him carefully. Your lives depend upon his safe custody.” He then advanced to the front, and soon his voice was again heard above the din of battle calling on the soldiers to do their best.

Captain Bordeleau stood a moment petrified with amazement at his words, then, as the two officers approached him, he handed them his sword and side arms, and with a cynical smile submitted to the humiliation of being bound.

## CHAPTER XVII

### WHEREIN A TRAITOR IS BROUGHT TO JUSTICE

FRONTENAC's presence among his troops roused their enthusiasm to the highest pitch. The enemy rallied again and again to the attack, but were as often repulsed. Finally they withdrew into the woods, the French mercifully ceasing their fire to enable them to bear away their wounded. In the mean time the remainder of the English fleet withdrew, crippled and disheartened, to the point where they had anchored the day before. Word being brought of the defeat of the land force, Phips ordered boats ashore and brought away the wounded, leaving the survivors to camp where they were, pending a council of war which he at once ordered. When this was held a unanimous verdict was given by his officers in favor of a prompt withdrawal of

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all forces and a return to Boston forthwith. This plan being decided upon, all the forces on shore were recalled, and the disabled vessels moved a couple of leagues farther down the river in order that the work of repairing the ships sufficiently to render them seaworthy might be undertaken unmolested.

At the withdrawal of the enemy, all Quebec rejoiced. Bells were rung and at night bonfires were lighted around which the hardy trappers (the *coureurs-de-bois*), excited by joy and brandy, danced and shouted. The cathedral was filled with thankful worshipers, while the choir sang a *Te Deum* in gratitude for the deliverance of the city. A plentiful dinner was served to all the officers in the evening, at which the Governor, flushed with pride and success, presided.

The three boys were entertained in the cozy back room at Ormesson's house until a late hour, listening to his recital of the different events of the day. The trader seemed overflowing with good spirits, and showed his affection for the

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brothers by clapping them on the back at frequent intervals, and every now and then giving each a bearish hug. These signs of joy were interspersed with sundry mysterious winks and chuckles that the boys were at first disposed to interpret as the manifestation of over-indulgence in wine. But, noticing the fact that he barely touched his glass during the entire evening, they were at a loss to account for his unusual merriment. When they finally separated for the night, he approached Pierre and Jean and throwing an arm affectionately about each he said, addressing François:

“To-day has been a great day for New France. To-morrow will be a greater one for these two friends of ours.” With which enigmatical remark he bade them good night.

In the morning the streets of Quebec were thronged by an excited crowd. A rumor had somehow spread about that Captain Bordeleau had been detected in an act of treason during the battle of the previous day, and that he was to be tried before the council that morning at ten.

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The square in front of the Château was packed as the hour approached. The rumor was confirmed by the sight of the different members of the council making their way toward the Château.

Finally four soldiers appeared leading the accused from the house where he had been confined to the place of trial. As he passed, the people crowded near, and angry murmurs and jeers arose as he proceeded. Between the soldiers the man walked, his arms bound and his eyes cast upon the ground. His face was pale and bore a mingled look of fear and anger upon it. As the taunts of the populace greeted his ears he flushed and a sneer appeared upon his countenance. Only once did he look up. Then as his glance fell upon the assembled people, his eyes chanced to rest upon the face of an Indian standing quietly among the excited throng. A look of recognition flashed between them, the officer's lips parted as though to speak, but he closed them without uttering a sound and passed thoughtfully on with lowered eyes.

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Within the council chamber at the Château preparations for the trial had been completed. About a long table in the middle of the room sat the members of the council, stern and solemn-looking, as befitted the occasion. At the head, seated in his high-backed chair of state, was the Governor, his brow dark and foreboding. About the room stood many officers. At one side, partly hidden by those standing up, Ormesson, in company with the two brothers, sat on a low bench.

The prisoner was led in, his arms unbound, and he was shown to his allotted position. Frontenac arose.

“Captain Bordeleau,” he began in a cold, hard voice, “you stand here accused of high treason; of attempting to deliver the city to the enemy; of betraying the colony for English gold.”

The accused man started at these words. He had not been informed of any reason for his arrest, and had supposed that the utmost against him would be a charge of cowardice on the field of battle. He trembled in spite of himself.

The Governor continued:



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“In detail your accusation is as follows.” Here he gave in full the various steps in the treasonable plot. When he finished Captain Bordeleau opened his mouth and said, with an effort to appear at ease: “And who, pray, is my accuser? Has the enemy volunteered this strange piece of information? I wonder at your giving credence to anything coming from such a source.”

“It is not from English lips that you shall hear the first testimony, but from French,” replied the governor. He motioned to Jean, who arose and came forward beside the table.

At sight of his nephew, whom he supposed to be at that moment safe in the hands of the redskins many leagues distant, if indeed he were alive at all, the prisoner started back in undisguised surprise. Jean, a good deal abashed at speaking before this assembly, told in a simple, straightforward manner the history of the conversation overheard at the stern of the English flagship. When he finished a murmur of astonishment ran around the group of officers. A

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moment's silence followed. With an effort Captain Bordeleau smiled:

"My nephew, who ran away from my friendly roof, I see has come back. In return for my previous care and protection he brings you this improbable story. Fearing my anger because of his escapade he strives to injure me. I have no fear that he will be believed. My reputation, I flatter myself, is secure against any lies this young cub may tell. I presume you will go on to claim that the appointment mentioned in his fanciful tale was kept by me. Perchance you have a witness who will testify that he was present at the mythical meeting?" and the speaker, somewhat reassured, looked at the Governor with an ironical smile.

"I have," was the answer, delivered in such a menacing tone that the prisoner's smile died quickly away, and a look of alarm took its place.

"Produce him," he managed to articulate half-defiantly.

"He stands before you," was the calm reply. Frontenac then gave his testimony regarding his

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visit to the cave and the words overheard there. After him spoke the officer who had been present, and then Jacques Ormesson.

As Captain Bordeleau listened, his knees grew unsteady and smote against each other and his hands trembled. The company before him became one blurred mass of faces; a roaring sounded in his ears. He struggled unsuccessfully to regain his composure. The last blow was struck as Frontenac, reaching down beneath the table, produced a bag of money and a roll of papers, which he threw down in front of the prisoner. "There is the gold we heard you count and the bills you so carefully examined. Your house was searched last night, and they were found in a drawer of your private desk. Each member of the council was requested to pass your home on the way here and note the white cross upon the door. You all saw it, did you not, messieurs?" Each member nodded. Frontenac then called one of the soldiers who had aided in the defense of the ford. He testified as to the order to retreat after the first volley.

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Completely crushed, Captain Bordeleau sank into a chair amid an accusing silence. In a moment he had gathered his remaining energies together and sprang to his feet shouting: "It is a lie, a false, wicked lie, a plot of some enemy to ruin me. You surely cannot believe this atrocious thing of me, who have lived so long among you all without reproach." Eagerly he addressed with a look the faces of the council. Reading in the eyes of each one only cold disbelief of his protestations, he gave a convulsive gasp, then with a supreme effort drew himself up and looked in silence for a moment on all about him, and finally broke into a discordant laugh.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! The game is played and I have lost. It is a risk we all must run who gamble with fate. But tell me, messieurs, was it not a pretty game, and was not the stake worthy? Think of it, eleven thousand louis, more money than this impoverished Colony has seen in many years all told! Had I succeeded I should not be here to-day, but safe on my way to enjoy the

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reward of my ingenuity. How could I foresee that that sneaking brat"—here he cast a malevolent glance at Jean—"was listening outside the cabin window. However, I nearly succeeded, and failed through no fault of my own. There is some comfort in that. Come, your Excellency, let us finish with this business. I am weary, and our interview is beginning to bore me." The man ceased speaking and, folding his arms, awaited the further action of the council with impassive features.

Frontenac then proceeded to the vote. As he called the name of each member of the council, he arose, bowed, and answered "Guilty!" When all had finished, the prisoner, bowing with mock solemnity at the Governor, exclaimed, "And I, too, say 'Guilty'!"

The Governor, not noticing his insolence, proceeded to his final duty. "I hereby sentence you to be led to the Place d'Armes at noon to-morrow in the presence of your fellow-townsmen, and after being degraded from your rank, shot. So may the punishment of

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this abominable crime prove a warning to all."

After a moment's silence Frontenac turned to the council and officers and said:

"I have kept back another accusation lest I should seem to prejudice your minds against the prisoner before the verdict was rendered. Had he been held innocent of the crime of treason I should have preferred other charges against him—that of abduction of his two nephews, and connivance at their probable destruction."

He thereupon related briefly the history of the seizure of the boys, their terrible experiences and escape, ending with:

"You thus see the character of the man. He who would not hesitate to destroy his own flesh and blood would hardly stop at the betrayal of his king."

Captain Bordeleau burst into a roar of mocking laughter. "*Ma foi!* Your Excellency does not know all, for all your wisdom. The brats were in my way and I removed them. It seems I was not entirely successful. However, I did the

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same thing with their father three years ago, and succeeded admirably, for he, at least, will never come back," and as he was led away he still shook with hysterical mirth, the sounds of which sent a thrill of horror through the startled spectators.

## CHAPTER XVIII

DEPICTS A GREAT SURPRISE, WHICH IS FOLLOWED BY  
AN UNEXPECTED TRAGEDY

THE strain on the two brothers at the trial had been severe, and when it was all over they were glad to seek again the welcome quiet and retirement of the trader's home. Jacques Ormesson's unselfish good nature was much in evidence, for, after spending an hour with Pierre and Jean in an endeavor to divert their minds from the trying scene they had just witnessed, he hastened off to the house of the doctor to inquire concerning the condition of the sick stranger. His interview here seemed satisfactory, for he left smiling, and in an unusual good humor, going directly to the Château. The Governor evidently enjoyed his call, for he remained there nearly an hour, and when he left he promised to return at two.



## A GREAT SURPRISE

After he and the boys had finished dinner, he bade Pierre and Jean follow him to the Château. Arriving there he left them in one of the ante-rooms, asking them to wait. Passing on to the Governor's room he found him seated alone, expecting him. Presently a knock was heard at the door. It was opened and two soldiers marched in leading Captain Bordeleau between them. Having placed him in a chair with his back to the door, in obedience to Frontenac's signal they withdrew. The prisoner looked at the two men before him.

“Well, your Excellency, what new scene of pleasure have you prepared for me? I trust it will be more interesting than that of this morning.”

Frontenac frowned sternly and remained silent. Some minutes passed. A sound was heard outside and another knock was heard. The Governor opened the door himself and admitted the doctor and the sick stranger. The latter had improved wonderfully in appearance. His hair had been cut, his face shaved, and he

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was attired in well-fitting clothes. His walk betrayed no physical weakness. Only the dazed look and roving, careless eye showed that his mental state was still abnormal.

The Governor took him by the arm and led him around so as to face the prisoner, saying at the same time:

“Behold some of your wicked work!”

Captain Bordeleau glanced at the stranger indifferently, then suddenly his gaze became fixed and he uttered a cry of terror, springing up so quickly as to send the chair backward to the floor with a crash.

“Antoine! You alive?” he exclaimed.

The sick man looked dully at him for an instant, then to the onlookers there was visible a new light in the eye, a faint glimpse of returning reason. The prisoner’s cry, his startled voice, his quick movement, the sound of the falling chair, all combined to produce a powerful impression on the weakened brain. The struggling gleam became stronger, until suddenly there flashed the full light of intelligent recogni-

## A GREAT SURPRISE

tion across his face. Passing his hand across his brow with a troubled look, he said in a puzzled tone: "Brother Louis! It is you. When did you return? You have been away, have you not?"

Then noticing the others he greeted them:

"Your Excellency, too. I have not seen you for some time. Have I not been well? And my good friend Ormesson here also."

The little doctor in the background was unnoticed, but he rubbed his hands in delight. His plan of causing the two brothers to meet face to face had resulted in a shock to the weakened mind that had rolled back the curtain of forgetfulness, and his patient had taken up the thread of memory again at a point more than a year back. The terrible experiences and suffering that had intervened were mercifully forgotten.

The prisoner in the mean time had kept his eye upon his brother, watching the various stages of his returning memory. A glance at his scarred face and distorted hands revealed to him the fearful experiences through which he had

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passed. For the first time since his trial in the morning did he lose his insolent, cynical air, and a look of concern, almost of remorse, took its place.

Ormesson whispered to Frontenac, who nodded, and with an engaging air invited him who was indeed Antoine Bordeleau to accompany him. He did so and followed the Governor who, going to a door leading into the room in which Ormesson had left the boys, opened it, and motioned to him to enter, saying that there were two of his friends there whom he would be pleased to see. As soon as he had done so, Frontenac quietly closed the door.

For a moment there was a silence, then a great cry of joy and: "Pierre! Pierre! My little Jean!" came to the ears of the listeners on the other side of the door, followed by glad boyish shouts, and then a muffled sobbing. Ormesson grinned with delight. The little doctor murmured reassuringly: "Joy does not kill, it revives."

A tear of sympathy and pleasure at their re-

## A GREAT SURPRISE

united happiness glistened in the good Governor's eyes, but they grew hard and stern again as he summoned the guard to lead Captain Bordeleau back to his cell.

The prisoner raised his eyes, pleading now instead of insolent and defiant.

"One moment, your Excellency, if you please. I know I have no right to ask for favors at your hands, but recollect that I have but a few hours to live, and grant me two requests."

The man's apparently sincere humility moved the Governor to inquire what they were.

"One is that my brother shall not be allowed to see me again before—before noon to-morrow. The worst of men have some slight remnants of conscience left. I could not bear to meet his eyes again now that he has regained his reason, knowing what agony he has endured through my fault. He does not yet remember any of those hideous experiences, and does not know the wrong I have done him."

The Governor bowed. "It shall be as you wish."

### COMRADES THREE

“The second request is suggested by the thought of the meeting in yonder room between parent and sons. I, too, have a son. No wonder you all start, but it is true nevertheless. When I first came from France, in my wandering in the wilderness I met an Indian maiden, beautiful and loving. We were married. A son was born. The mother died soon after. I refused to acknowledge the relationship openly, but have secretly cared for the boy all these years. He grew up among his own people and has frequently visited me here in Quebec. You know of him. The French call him ‘The Rat.’ He has often caused you trouble, for he has his father’s taste for intrigue. He is the only one of my flesh and blood I can look upon, knowing I have never harmed him. He is the only one who can look upon me without shrinking in hate or disgust. He is now in the city. I saw him in the crowd this morning on my way to the Château. I know where he can be found. I crave a meeting with him that I may say farewell.”

## A GREAT SURPRISE

The Governor was touched in spite of himself. He gave his consent. The guard was called in and after a murmured word of thanks the prisoners were led away.

By the Governor's orders a messenger was dispatched to the address given by the prisoner, and in a short time he returned accompanied by the Indian, who was none other than "The Rat," the leader of the party who had carried the boys off. Fifteen minutes were allowed for the interview, which was held in the cell of the condemned, a soldier being present. The time was spent in earnest conversation, and at its expiration the Indian took his final leave, Captain Bordeleau giving him a parting embrace.

Ormesson found the boys and their father in the happy enjoyment of each other's society. The joy of the father had been tempered by the news of his wife's death, but he manfully strove to control his feelings that the pleasure of the boys should not be lessened. All three soon set out for the trader's house to sup, and on the way Ormesson took the opportunity of whispering to

## COMRADES THREE

both Pierre and Jean that they must not mention their uncle's plight to their father, as it was not deemed advisable by the doctor for him to experience any further deep emotion that day. A short period of rest must elapse before he could learn all. It was with this end in view that the trader separated them all at an early hour, sending them to bed to recover from the excitement of the past twelve hours. On parting with them, Ormesson playfully pinched Jean's ear and said:

"Did I not say last night that to-day would be a great day for you two?"

"Yes," replied the lad with a happy sigh. "It has been the very greatest we have ever known."

As the noon hour approached on the following morning, the Place d'Armes, the open square in front of the Château, was filled with a jostling, excited mob, eager to witness the execution of the faithless officer. A number of soldiers were on guard keeping the crowd back from the fatal spot. At the first stroke of twelve from the great clock of the Château, the grim procession





"A bit of steel flashed in the air."



## A GREAT SURPRISE

started out from the fort in its slow progress to the place appointed. As before, the condemned man proceeded between four soldiers, two of whom walked about six feet ahead of him and the other two six feet behind. He wore his full uniform and was not bound in any way. His appearance was greeted by yells of execration from the throng, to which he paid no attention, keeping his chin down, but allowing his eyes to rove furtively over the near-by faces. Finally, when about halfway across the Place he caught sight of the familiar face of "The Rat" standing stolidly in the front rank of the onlookers, wrapped in a dirty blanket. The prisoner kept his eyes fixed upon the savage's face as he advanced along his path.

When directly opposite him and but a few feet distant, the Indian made a sudden movement of his arm, and a bit of steel flashed in the air. He had tossed a dagger to the condemned man, who deftly caught it, and before the nearest soldier could move to stop him, plunged it into his own breast with the cry, "I've cheated you all at

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last," and fell dead upon the pavement. In an instant all was confusion, during which the Indian slipped off through the press and could not be found later, when all Quebec was carefully searched for him.

Alone in a room at the trader's house the father and the two boys awaited solemnly the striking of the hour. That morning Ormesson had quietly told Antoine Bordeleau a full history of his brother's crimes and the fate he was about to meet. At the first stroke of twelve the three knelt and continued in silent prayer for the man who had used them all so ill, straining their ears to catch the sound of the shot that was never fired.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A CHAPTER OF MERITED REWARDS AND HAPPINESS

THE day after this tragic event another meeting of the council was called. The three boys, together with Antoine Bordeleau and Jacques Ormesson, were bidden to attend. On arriving at the Château they were asked to wait in an adjoining room. An hour passed, and they were beginning to wonder at the delay, when word was received from Frontenac for them to enter the council chamber. They did so and quietly took their seats, wondering what was about to take place. They had not long to wait, for the Governor spoke to them in a kindly tone:

“The last time some of you were present in this room you beheld this honorable body assembled in a judicial capacity. But it exercises other powers. It can reward as well punish. Antoine Bordeleau,” he continued after a pause, addressing the father, “the council has investi-

## COMRADES THREE

gated the claim of Captain Bordeleau, your brother, that the Indian known to us as 'The Rat' was his son. This has been disproved, and it was found to be only a ruse of the prisoner to gain an interview with the savage and instruct him regarding the part he was to play in his intended suicidal act. You are therefore the nearest living heir to the deceased. The council hereby confirms you in your heirship and grants you immediate possession of his house and contents and whatever other property belonged to him at his death. We have learned of the hardships you have undergone, the result of your brother's baseness, and as an expression of our sympathy and regret we have accorded you special trading privileges, here detailed, which will be of future value to you." And he held out a paper confirming all that he had said.

Antoine Bordeleau received this with a bow, together with many words of gratitude.

"To you three lads," Frontenac continued, looking admiringly at the boys, "the King probably owes the preservation of his fair city of

## REWARDS AND HAPPINESS

Quebec. Through your alertness, activity, and deep loyalty to duty and honor, even though it involved the disgrace of a near kinsman, the enemy has been repulsed. His Majesty shall be fully informed of the important part you have played in the events of the past few days, and I shall leave it to him to reward you according to his royal pleasure.

“The council has learned of the existence of the brotherhood, the bonds of which have been so successfully tested. It has also heard with pleasure of your military aspirations. Such courage, such faithfulness to each other and loyalty to the King must not be wasted. They are the qualities that make the finest soldiers and most worthy subjects. Although you are all too young to enter the regular service at present, I have created the posts of Colonial scouts for you to fill. Your experience in woodcraft will make it possible for you to render the King and Colony invaluable service during the troublous times we have entered upon. Your pay will be each that of a lieutenant to compensate you for

### COMRADES THREE

the extra risks you will be called upon to run. In addition François will receive a gift of a hundred louis to indemnify his father for the loss of his services at home. May you all bring to your new work the same earnestness and devotion you have shown hitherto."

The boys were overpowered at the good news that opened to them the careers they long had coveted. They murmured their thanks half-bashfully, but their beaming countenances told better than words of their great joy.

"And now, Ormesson, my friend," and Frontenac glanced at him with a look of deep feeling, "what can we do for you? Your interest in these lads, your counsel, your unswerving loyalty, have all contributed to the success of their efforts."

"Thanks, your Excellency," replied the trader in a modest, deprecating tone; "what little I have done needs no reward. My affection has prompted me to aid them in whatever way I was able. Their evident regard for me is ample recompense. What I have done for my King is but the duty of every loyal subject. The knowledge



## REWARDS AND HAPPINESS

of having helped in some small degree in the preservation of his beloved Colony is more precious to me than any material compensation. I have gold sufficient for my needs." Then with a glance at the boys and a sigh: "I crave nothing your Excellency or the honorable council could give me. Mine is a lonely life. I have few wants."

"Nobly spoken," exclaimed the Governor, as he warmly seized Ormesson's hand. "If every heart were as true as yours New France would soon be mistress of a hemisphere."

At ten o'clock that night the last meeting of the brotherhood was held in the cave. A good fire was kindled, and soon its warm glow lighted up every part of its interior. The adventures of the past three months were discussed, and eager plans for the future were made. François announced his intention of returning home the next day. His face glowed with pleasure. "The hundred louis given me by the Governor," he explained, "will enable my father to buy a piece of land for himself. He will have to rent no

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longer. It has been the dream of his life to own a farm."

A moment of silence followed. Then Pierre, who had been gazing thoughtfully into the fire, exclaimed: "I wish the sum had been a hundred times larger, for I feel that to you alone the success of the brotherhood is due. Without your aid we could have done nothing."

"Yes, indeed," chimed in Jean; "had you not delivered us from the hands of the savages, we should never have returned."

"Nonsense!" replied François. "Had it not been for your insisting we would have left the sick prisoner behind in his hut, and you would not now both be rejoicing in your restored father. Had it not been for Pierre's help we never could have carried him away. One of us has done no more than the other two. Did we not all agree to be loyal and true to each other? We have all tried to keep our promise, that is all. We have learned to know and esteem each other. Our experiences have taught us how much better an unselfish care for others is than a thoughtless

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concern for self alone. If we have learned this, the brotherhood has been a success. Let us hope our past association is but the beginning; that in the future opportunities for mutual help in time of peril may increase rather than diminish. Then will our friendship be the greatest thing in our lives."

A week passed and found the boys and their father comfortably settled in the large house Captain Bordeleau had formerly occupied, whose gloom was already partly dispelled by the happiness and joy they had brought into it. Night had come, and they were gathered about the broad fireplace in which were heaped the flaming logs that made the lighted candles unnecessary. With them sat their friend and constant visitor, Jacques Ormesson, one boy on each side of him in affectionate proximity. Conversation had flagged, and that moment had come which is only possible among close friends, when no necessity for talk was felt, but each followed silently the leading of his own thoughts, yet keeping in conscious communion with the others.

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Antoine Bordeleau was the first to break the silence.

“*Mon ami*,” said he, addressing the trader, “my cup of joy is almost filled to-night. Two things only are wanting. One is that you, who have done so much for us and whom we all love, should lack some deep personal happiness such as we ourselves enjoy in our reunited lives.”

The trader smiled dreamily, still watching the fire, and a shadow of loneliness passed over his face. “Who knows,” he murmured; “perhaps my joy is on the way; perhaps it is already knocking at the door!”

“The second thing,” continued Bordeleau, his voice trembling with rising emotion, “is that her face is missing, she who so nobly suffered in the days of our distress and was taken ere the dawn came—my wife.” Then going to the desk he opened a drawer and taking out a small object returned to the firelight. “I found this in a box of my effects that had been untouched by my brother. It is a miniature painted just after our marriage, a likeness of my Angelique.”

## REWARDS AND HAPPINESS

At the name Ormesson's heart gave a painful throb of recollection. Taking the picture he leaned toward the fire to examine it, then as his eyes scanned the tiny features he leaped to his feet with a cry:

"Your Angelique? It is *my* Angelique, too, my long-lost and beloved sister!"

Antoine Bordeleau started and stared incredulously at the speaker.

"Ormesson — Ormesson—" he stammered; "the name was so common—I never thought when I met you in Quebec——"

The trader, overcome with emotion, murmured: "It was a runaway match. We never knew the man's name whom she married." Then, as a gleam of deepest happiness irradiated his face, he cried:

"Did I not say perhaps a great joy was already knocking at the door? I was right. It has already come. Behold, to-night," he continued, as he extended his right hand, which Bordeleau eagerly grasped, "you meet a brother, and you," turning to the two astounded boys,

### COMRADES THREE

who, beginning to grasp the truth, rushed into his extended arms, "find an uncle to take the place of the one you have recently lost. While I—my solitary heart overflows with joy, for I discover that I am no longer alone, but have three bound to me not only by ties of love but also of blood. Ah! *Le bon Dieu*, He is so good!"

(1)

THE END

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